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UNCLE MARK. Frontispiece.

UNCLE MARK'S AMARANTHS.

BY

ANNE G. HALE.

BOSTON:
D. LOTHROP & COMPANY,
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UNCLE MARK'S AMARANTHS.

CHAPTER I.

"ARE THEY REAL FLOWERS?"

UNCLE MARK, leaning heavily on the crooked, gnarled stick that served him for a cane, and bearing a huge basket, trudged slowly homeward.

The low winter sun set his burly figure in high relief against the long row of Thornton's green-houses.

His face, only a meagre snarl of knots and furrows, looked unusually ugly this afternoon, for he was very tired. A habit of shrugging, as if to rid himself of a burden, had raised his shoulders nearly to his ears. So his rusty shag coat and slouched fur cap

completed his resemblance to an old black bear — and a cross old bruin he seemed to most of his neighbors, I must confess.

Yet he had not always been morose and ugly. Indeed, even now, at times, to those who knew him best he manifested agreeable and noble qualities. Then a light, like sunshine from a thunder-cloud beamed in his fine hazel eyes, lending his rugged features a marvellous comeliness.

The weather was unusually mild for December. But there had been cold, frosty nights and bleak days — just enough of winter to set everybody busy in making arrangements for warmth and comfort during the next three months. Christmas too was drawing near; and, in spite of hard times, few were willing to look forward to that festival without putting forth fresh efforts for the increase of cheerful and kind feelings — without laying plans for the promotion of content and happiness — so inspiriting is the anticipation of that blessed season and so enduring is its influence.

"Oh! you are getting ready for Christmas,

too, I see," said a pleasant voice behind Uncle Mark, and immediately Mr. Thornton stood at his side, in a neighborly way laying one hand on the bail of the old man's basket.

There was a shrug of the high shoulders and a bear-like growl—"Ah-h-h. Not I. No! I've nobody to want Christmas things—nobody to make Christmas for."

"This great basket looks somewhat that way."

"There's nothing in it, nothing for Christmas," was the peevish reply.

"You needn't try to make me think you haven't something here; come now, Uncle. And a pretty good weight too. Plenty of nice and handsome things for somebody, if I were to guess," responded Mr. Thornton, with a cheery laugh.

"If you call beans and herring and onions and tobacco nice and handsome," rejoined Uncle Mark, in his gruffest, surliest manner. "And I expect to use them all myself. I've nothing to spare to anybody;" emphasizing the last word with a petulant thrust of his cane toward a tree they were passing.

Mr. Thornton dropped the subject. Walking up from town, where he had been making Christmas purchases, his mind filled with pleasant thoughts of the delight and gratitude which this and that pretty or useful gift would awaken, it was natural for him to suppose that every great basket he saw held similar articles. But he found he had made a mistake. So he turned the conversation to the weather, spoke of its favorable effect upon his plants.

"Mighty unhealthy," growled Uncle Mark. "If we could have a good, sharp frost, and then a smart snow-storm, we'd be well fixed for winter. I hope it will come before Christmas, too."

By a negative shake of the head, yet with a pleasant smile, Mr. Thornton expressed dissent.

"That isn't *my* idea only," went on the old man sullenly. Then in more gentle tones, "Phebe, she used to say so. She was about right in most things. Don't you think she was, sir?"

"Your wife? A sensible and a worthy woman she was, truly."

"Yes, yes, that she was" (tender indeed, and tremulous, was the usually harsh voice now). "She had a verse she used to say:

> 'There'll be sorrow and woe with a Christmas green,
> But frost and snow keep the churchyard lean.'

Did you ever hear that before?"

"I can't say I haven't; I believe there's an old rhyme of that sort. But I never paid it much attention," replied Mr. Thornton. "The truth is I am so fond of the green things growing I am always glad to have the snow keep off as long as it will."

"Not out of season. Never!" exclaimed Uncle Mark, his tones again rough and sharp, as usual. "Not for me; it's unnatural; it's time for winter weather now."

"Well, well; we shall have winter enough, no doubt," rejoined Mr. Thornton. "But let us enjoy all the warmth and freshness and brightness that we can have at any time."

"I don't see much enjoyment about it, any way," muttered the old man. "I never find any, for my part."

"Why not? there's just as much as we're

willing to take," said Mr. Thornton, earnestly. "Only keep your heart open, neighbor, and you will find it — in plenty, too."

Uncle Mark scowled, but said nothing.

"I must say that I shrink from cold and frost and snow, wherever they are," continued Mr. Thornton. "Cold is death, you know; warmth is life. Perhaps I am more observant of these matters on account of my plants, so many of the poor things shrink and shrivel and die at the first breath of winter. And then when warm weather comes, bringing them life again they seem so grateful — putting on their greenness and beauty with such alacrity. I often wish there were neither cold nor frost, and try all I can to keep everything of the sort away from my premises as long as possible."

"Well, we might as well get used to such things, cold weather and snow," replied Uncle Mark doggedly. "We must have 'em, any way."

They were now at Mr. Thornton's gate. Relinquishing his hold of the basket he said with much seriousness, "Yes; that's so, Uncle.

But I trust, whatever the weather may be, we shall both of us have a green Christmas in our hearts. Frost and snow there must be dangerous to the health of the soul."

Uncle Mark jogged on in his usual slow, clumsy manner. The basket, without his kind neighbor's helping hand, seemed heavier than ever; and those last words puzzled the old man, and troubled him not a little. They had a familiar sound, but he could not remember when or where he had heard them before; and he became so absorbed in searching for their whereabouts in his disorderly and somewhat enfeebled mind that he did not heed the approach of two mischievous boys, a little in the rear, and giggling with great glee.

He uttered a sound, something between a growl and a grunt. The boys giggled much louder. But even that he did not notice. Then in a deep, guttural voice he said to himself:

"Certainly, you old stupid! Phebe would have known in a minute. Yes, yes; 'which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health.' The very words, sure enough!

Ah! Well, well, now. I wonder if my soul's getting unhealthy. 'Twould be worse than rheumatism — and that's bad enough."

Scarcely had he spoken these words when one of the boys set up a derisive shout, and at the same time knocked off his cap. While he attempted to recover it both the young rascals upset his basket, scattering its contents in all directions — the well-beloved tobacco alone remaining uninjured — for feet assisted hands in the work of destruction. Then, before the cap was fairly in his benumbed and fumbling fingers, the scamps had disappeared, stealing a ride in a passing wagon.

This was but one of the numerous tricks that were played upon him, for Uncle Mark Weston was called "an old curmudgeon," "a cross old bear," and had become the butt of all the unmannerly children of the neighborhood. There were some, it is true, who, knowing the trouble that had befallen him, pitied the scowling, surly old man, and yet looked askance whenever they met him, such frightful stories had been told of his growling voice and of the lonely, desolate life he lived in his dilapidated cottage.

But as he frequently said that he hated children, of course most children hated him, and hesitated not to show their hatred whenever they could do so without fear of harm to themselves. Still, though they were always expecting some terrible punishment at his hands, he did them no actual injury — never went beyond a scowl and a growl. Yet he was naturally fond of children, and, if kind services were any proof, he did not hate the two little daughters of one neighbor who had given him employment; nor one other little girl, who, with her mother, had done much to make his life less dreary. For them he had pleasant words, generally; a pretty flower now and then, or a nice peach or apple; and was always glad and proud to have them snatch away his cane in order to grasp his big, hard hand in their small, caressing fingers.

After gathering up part of the wasted contents of his basket, with a heart full of anger toward the boys, longing to tell of their misbehavior, and eager for sympathy, he passed by the house where this good neighbor, Mrs. Grey, lived, and looked wistfully up at her window, hoping to see Patience, his favorite little girl,

who often sat there. But he could not see her — she was not at the window; and he went on homeward in sadness, forgetting his anger and his injuries in thoughts of love and pity for her; she must be worse, he supposed, much more ill than usual, not to be at the window.

Patience was not in sight just then because she was attempting an unusual feat; one at which he as well as her mother would have remonstrated; and she was chatting merrily to herself:

"Well, yes; I guess I am. It must be the crack in the glass that makes one shoulder look higher. I don't know, though. No, it isn't either. Hold my head up, this way. There — that's it. And it don't bring back the old ache! Yes, I guess she will, if I can do as well 'most all the time."

She had managed to perch herself upon a stool in front of her mother's looking-glass, and after sitting there a minute had raised her slight figure to its full height, that she might get a good view of her lame shoulder. With a quiet smile on her little, thin face, which made it almost beautiful, having found the view satisfac

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tory, she slipped slowly from the stool and walked across the room to the low easy chair she had long occupied. She wished — oh, so much! to be able to go out of doors and breathe the fresh, free air, to walk through the busy streets, like other children.

Alice White had just been in, telling her of the beantiful things in the shop-windows, which Santa Claus was expected to buy and distribute. She told her too of a Christmas-tree to which she had been invited, and hinted of the pretty gifts laid away in her mother's bureau-drawer for her sister Edith and herself.

"And, Pashie dear," she said, seeing tears in the sick girl's eyes, "you shall have half of my goodies, indeed you shall!"

"It isn't that," returned Patience. "I don't care for cake or candy, or Christmas presents — not much. Only I should like to see how those nice things look in the windows, to walk down there as you do, I mean."

"Oh! if *that's* all, Pashie dear — why, perhaps you can next week; I'll go with you any time," and with a gay good-by and a careless skip Alice was gone, little realizing the bless-

ings of good health and sound limbs that were freely granted her, but for which poor Patience eagerly longed.

Patience was knitting a mitten for her brother Dan, but the moment Alice left she threw it down, and with much difficulty crept, rather than walked, towards her mother's glass, and took that deliberate look at herself. Excited and fatigued by these exertions she could not resume her work, and was soon lost in thought, going over in memory the events of the last three months.

She recollected distinctly how bright the sunshine lay on the fields and meadows the last day that she was out doors; how handsome the great yellow pumpkins trained along the wall of Uncle Mark's garden looked, seeming to grow handsomer and bigger every moment, as the sun went higher and grew hotter. How the apples on Uncle Mark's trees glistened! as if their red cheeks were full of laughter. How merrily the wind tossed the white tufts of the clematis hanging on the alder-bushes, rustled the dry leaves, and whirled them about in all sorts of antics! She remembered, too, how the

wind tugged at her dress, and twirled and tangled her hair. How softly it passed — as if it were a cool, kind hand — across her heated face. Oh, for one touch of those cool, soft fingers now on her flushed and throbbing cheek!

What a jolly time she had then with Alice and Edith White, while John shook the apple-tree, and those splendid baldwins tumbled and stumbled in such a shower, pelting and thumping and bumping, on necks and noses and cheeks, on shoulders and heads and hands, anywhere, everywhere — while they scrambled round to fill their baskets, laughing and shouting at every bump and thump! Ah, that was fine sport!

But soon, in her wild frolic, she would climb the tree and help John shake one, just one fine bough. And Uncle Mark had told them his trees were not fit for girls to climb — if any trees ever were, he wasn't sure. And then the next she knew she was on her little bed, in her own room. Dan had said since that he brought her there, in his strong arms.

Dan hadn't gone to the Mines then; and he and Uncle Mark were talking with Doctor

Thornton, and her mother was listening anxiously (she remembered just how she looked) though she was preparing medicine in a cup, while the doctor said the worst was over — she would soon be all right. He was very kind, this new doctor, and everybody said he knew more than old Dr. Mullins. But how many days and nights of pain she had had all these long weeks — September till now! Every time he called he told her mother she would soon be out, and she hadn't even peeped into the open air yet. She could not stay in any longer — must surely go out, a few steps each day; and so by next week be able to walk all the way down to the stores.

Then she began to imagine what she should see in the store-windows, and to think who would have them — thinking — thinking, till her thoughts became dreams. She had laid one crimson cheek against the cushioned back of her chair and thus fell asleep. Her mother, coming in with a bundle of work, seeing that flushed face sighed dolefully.

Trip, a small Newfoundland dog, bounded noisily after Mrs. Grey, and, jumping around

the low chair, with a shrill bark woke the child. Thus suddenly aroused she cried, alarmed, "Why, why, what has happened? Any bad news from Dan, mother?"

"Oh, no; nothing has happened, dear."

"But you are sorry about something. What makes you so? Are you tired, mother dear?—Don't, don't Trip. Go away, sir! you tire me dreadfully;" the dog, thrusting his shaggy head into her lap, was almost devouring her pale hands with kisses. But the obedient creature flung himself instantly to the floor, crouching at her feet.

"I *am* tired, very tired, Pashie," answered Mrs. Grey, seating herself. "It is a long walk to Ferguson's."

"I shall soon be able to help you in the sewing; and then, besides that, I mean to bring and carry your bundles. Don't you see how straight I am getting?" And she drew her crooked little figure as straight as possible, and held her head firmly erect.

Her mother smiled. Tears were in her eyes. Her lips moved, but she could not speak.

"Aren't you glad, mother dear?" went on

the eager child. "Just let me show you how nicely I can walk, I found it all out myself after Alice went home."

"You haven't tried to *walk?*" said Mrs. Grey, by great effort regaining her voice.

"Why, yes; I thought I would try just for a moment. Because you see if I don't try I shall never get out. And I am so tired of staying in the house! I said to myself, 'If mother only knows I can walk she will let me go down street a little way.' And so I tried, only a few steps, and I *could* walk, really and truly, mother. Alice says the shop-windows are full of pretty things for Christmas. Oh! I do want to see them! Just let me take a few steps now to show you."

"No, no!" said her mother, rising hastily, and taking the child in her arms. "My darling, I can't let you. Try to be my own patient little daughter, a short time yet. Just think what I have often said about choosing your name. Your pillows need fixing. There! Now! Let's place you in the chair once more, for I must be off again. Isn't that comfortable?"

"Oh, nice! But, please, may I go with you?" pleaded Patience in piteous tones. "It is such a bright day and so mild. I'll be wrapped up, hood and mittens and all. Only think, I haven't had them on this winter yet!"

"No, no, indeed," answered Mrs. Grey, smoothing the soft brown hair about the girl's thin temples. "But it's only to the grocer's."

"I'll go slowly, mother; and only as far as Krall's — just to look at his lovely dolls — one look, only; at his walking-dolls, that Alice talked about. Say yes; do, please."

"Perhaps next week you can, dear," returned her mother, at the same time counting the money in her purse.

"Next week! Oh, it has been next week so long! But do you think for certain, mother dear, that I can go next week? If you do I won't ask till then. I do want to see those pretty things before they are gone. If I can't — if we are too poor to have Christmas presents I should like just to look at those, and guess who will have them."

"Oh! there'll be plenty of time for that.

And I shouldn't wonder — I guess you'll have a Christmas present, too."

"You do? That's a dear, good mother," and the arms of the child were instantly twined around that mother's neck and one hot hectic cheek pressed close to that faded face.

Mrs. Grey couldn't leave Patience yet, though the sun was sinking, and she knew it would be quite dark before she could accomplish her errand. She took her again to her lap and kissed the little quivering lips, a moment previous ready to cry with disappointment, now drawing themselves tightly at the corners, and bravely driving away the grief that made a sharp pain in the slender throat. They sat quietly a few minutes; then Patience repeated what Alice had told about Christmas.

"Now I really must go," said her mother. "And you are very tired. Let me lay you on the bed to rest while I am away."

"Not a bit tired. But I feel strangely. See how hot my cheek is," and she placed her mother's hand against her flushed face.

Distressed at this new phase of her daughter's

illness, Mrs. Grey silently gathered her more closely in her arms. Thus the two remained some time, till Patience herself spoke of the errand at the grocer's.

Again the pillows were adjusted, the child seated comfortably, and her chair drawn to the window.

"The children will be going home from school," said Mrs. Grey. "You will want to see them as they pass; and perhaps Uncle Mark will go by. If he does, knock for him to come in. But be sure to keep quiet while I am gone. I'll leave Trip. You won't feel lonesome?"

"No, oh no. Trip, good fellow! Come here, sir!"

Nothing loth, the docile animal jumped to the window-sill, and placed himself so near that his long silky ears waved and fluttered against her face with every movement of his restless head.

"If I shouldn't get back till after dark and no one comes in, you won't be afraid?" said Mrs. Grey, taking a basket from the closet and going toward the door. "You can sing

some of your hymns to make the time pass pleasantly, you know."

Patience gave her a cheerful smile, and immediately began one of her favorite songs — a little childish air that her mother had taught her. With the sweet notes lingering in her ears, Mrs. Grey's feet kept time to the rhythm of the tune as she passed down the street.

In a few minutes Uncle Mark's stout figure drew near the window. Trip gave a loud bark, and Patience a tap with her knitting-needles. Between both signals Uncle Mark understood that he was wanted, and came in — was intending so to do, even if there had been no signal. For his cogitations over Mr. Thornton's words and the mischief of the rude boys made his home seem so much more gloomy than usual he could not endure it another moment.

"Take care, uncle," said Patience, the instant he opened the door. "Don't stumble over mother's rocking-chair; and go straight to the stove, please, and light a lamp. I know mother would wish you to. I promised

I'd keep quiet while she's gone to the grocer's. You know where the lamps are?"

"I think I might know by this time. I've been here enough, I reckon, to get the lay of the land," he answered, as he opened the stove-door, and afterward fumbled along the mantle-shelf, till he reached a lamp which he soon lighted.

Trip came forward for his usual greeting — a stroke of the neck and ears; then returned to his young mistress, and threw himself on the rug at her feet.

"Strange how knowing such creatures are," said the old man, while hanging up his overcoat and cap. They beat all, I do declare. Now, you're alone, Pashie, and he thinks he's got the care of you — proud and important as you please, he is. Dog-nature's better than human; some ways, certainly."

"Why, Uncle Mark! Trip's a nice dog, I don't know what we should do without him. But then he isn't — he can't be so good as human — as *people*, I mean. He hasn't the soul, so, of course, he can't; mother's told me so."

"Well, yes, child; I know that. But those who have souls don't always act as if they had. Anyhow, I've seen some that didn't;" and a heavy sigh told where old Mark Weston's thoughts were wandering.

He drew from his pocket an old knife, a piece of tobacco, and a pipe. He cut the tobacco, filled his pipe, and went to the stove. Taking thence a coal, with two or three uneasy whiffs that ended in groans the pipe was at last ready for smoking. Throwing himself into a chair, he continued:

"He sticks to you, Trip does, through thick and thin. (A whiff.) You haven't a closer friend, Pashie. (Whiff, whiff.) Wish I'd so close a friend. (Whiff.) Nobody cares for old Uncle Mark — not much. (Whiff.) Oh - ah! *nobody!* (Whiff, whiff, whiff.) Almost discouraged — *most dis*couraged, and — "

"Why, Uncle Mark!" interrupted Patience, with looks and tones of distress; "there's mother — and Dan — and me — surely. And — and — " she said this timidly, for she had never spoken in this way to him before — "and you've that other One — that true friend,

who is always near you. *You know who,* — though I don't speak His name. Don't you remember the hymn I sang the other day? And the verse mother likes so well —

> "'Art Thou My Father? I'll depend
> Upon the care of such a friend;
> And only wish to do and be
> Whatever seemeth good to Thee.'

"Oh! and I've a new song I guess you'd like. Just hear it."

To a sweet, bird-like melody she sang a few verses with a plaintive refrain — something about kind words and sweet thoughts — that seemed to move the old man deeply.

He kept his eyes upon her face with an earnest, searching gaze; smoking still through the first two verses. Then he laid down his pipe, and passed his trembling hand stealthily across his face two or three times. When she had sung the last words he drew toward a table near, folding his arms upon it, and bowed his head thereon.

For some minutes both were silent. Then he raised his head and said sadly:

"That's so, every word of it's true. Wish I wasn't so unmindful. My memory, that's the trouble. Things like that won't stay in mind, and so I get gloomy and peaking. Well, well, I shan't let such foolishness take so tight hold of me again."

"What is it? What troubles you so much?" asked Patience, with great concern.

"Oh — ah — ah! Nothing — nothing, child. There now, don't you worry! It's nothing worth speaking of. I've got something to make your eyes shine — came nigh forgetting that, too;" and he took from his coat-pocket a small, carefully folded package, which he placed in her hand.

She opened it hastily. "Oh!" she exclaimed in great delight. "*Flowers!* Are they, though, real flowers — did they *grow?*"

"Yes. They're *amaralds* — grew in my corner — over at the squire's garden, you know. And they are always just so — never fade, never wither."

"Oh, how lovely they are!" she returned, examining them closely.

Uncle Mark coughed, cleared his throat

twice, and then said in a tremulous voice:

"You see Mary, my Mary, used to raise them. And I used to like to see them Christmas time on the mantel-shelf, in her flower-glasses. Mother and she always made a big posy of them on purpose for Christmas. The last posy kept ever so long. Somehow I couldn't help thinking she'd remember those old Christmas times, when we hung up pine-boughs 'round the clock and the pictures, and braided bear's-foot and winter-green all over the windows, sticking in the amaralds to brighten up the green; and if she remembered she'd come back. That was when she first went away. So mother and I couldn't touch those flowers. No!—not on any account. There they staid. The white ones turned yellow some (nothing to hurt) the chimney smokes so—and I smoke too, you know. But the purple—they're the prettiest, seems to me—they kept bright, just as handsome as ever. Mrs. White, she saw them last spring, when I was down with the rheumatism; you haven't forgotten that spell?"

Patience nodded a reply.

"No; you ain't apt to forget. Well, she took a great notion to them, and asked if I couldn't raise some. So I planted the seed, and was amazed to see how well they turned out; considering they'd been kept so long. I had enough for a good-sized posy for her and Edith, and she told me to keep the rest. But I can't. Because — perhaps you know why."

Patience shook her head dubiously.

"Because — she that used to like 'em — my little girl, I mean — she isn't at home, now, you know." He brushed his sleeve across his face. Then — "But I should like to see them on your shelf. I can't have them on mine again, Pashie. So you take 'em for Christmas fixings."

"Thank you, thank you — ever — so — much," replied Patience. "I never saw any like them. I thought all flowers faded."

Just at this instant Mrs. Grey returned.

"Uncle Mark! Why, I can hardly see you for smoke!" she cried.

"Anything from Dan?" he asked eagerly. "What? *No letters?* He's sick, you may de-

pend. I'm always disappointed in my projects;" and he sighed heavily.

"Oh, no; I don't depend on anything so uncomfortable," was her reply. "'No news is good news.' Keep up a good heart. What's the use of distrusting and fearing, and contriving such a great load of anxiety to bow us to the ground, when we might walk along hopefully and see so much brightness around and above us?"

"*No* use, not a bit. But for all that I can't help surmising, and mistrusting, and getting down to heel."

"Yes you can, Uncle Mark. It's all in your will. *You will not trust.* That's why you find so much unhappiness — make so much for yourself, I mean. You must have more faith."

"Perhaps, perhaps. Ah-h-h! Nobody knows how much I want that. But it won't come."

"We can't have sunshine if we keep the shutters closed. Be willing to trust, to wait, to hope in patience; then you will be cheerful — then you will be happy."

Mrs. Grey had set aside her basket and

taken off her cloak and hood. Passing by Patience she saw the flowers. "Oh, *amaranths!* I haven't seen any since I was a child!" she exclaimed joyfully.

"Did you call them amaranths, mother?" asked Patience.

"That's it, then," said Uncle Mark. "I knew they were something heavenly, and thought they were *amaralds*—like the rainbow, you know, round about the throne that we read about in the Revelation—because they are so bright and never fade."

"I understand," said Mrs. Grey, smiling at his mistake.

"Well, it don't make any difference," he rejoined quietly. "Names are of no account. No matter what you call them so long as they are just the same as I planted."

"No, indeed," returned Mrs. Grey. "Then they are yours? How beautiful they are!"

"No. I've given 'em to Pashie. Such things aren't for me now—" and he repeated their history.

"O Uncle Mark!" said the good woman, in her most earnest tones; "I believe you

have been led to keep them for some important purpose. Mary must come home, and be just as much her old self to you as these new flowers are like those that once grew for her. You were content to destroy those — to lose them entirely — in order to obtain these. So let the years of her neglect and forgetfulness of you pass out of mind, and endeavor to recall your love for her by the same trust and hope that influenced you in planting the seed for these flowers."

"That would be a miracle — such a change in her. And we oughtn't to look for anything of that kind. No, no, no," he growled, "that goes beyond me."

"No greater miracle than the new life of bloom and beauty that sprang from the little dry seed that you put in the ground last spring. You believed then, when you planted it, that a new life would arise from its decay; and you have been rewarded for that faith in these lovely flowers that you gathered in the autumn. Now, if you will only do as much for Mary, you will have a like reward."

Uncle Mark moved uneasily in his chair

while she spoke. He made no reply, but went to the mantel-piece, and laying down his pipe looked steadily at a picture hanging there. It was an engraving — St. Augustine and his mother, Monica. He had seen the picture many times, and Mrs. Grey had told him its story. At this moment he seemed afraid to meet the gaze of that patient, long-suffering mother — his eyes rested only on the haggard face of the erring son, and that not long; he soon resumed his seat.

Mrs. Grey watched his movements with much interest, and waited, expecting him to speak next. As he said nothing, she went on:

"Yes, uncle; only hide away out of sight, that is *forgive* all her misdemeanors, with a firm belief that your efforts in her behalf will be answered as you desire. Expect the good growth and it will come; just as when you planted the seed and used all proper means for its growth. God is ready — is always ready to do his part. Will you — can you — refuse the slight endeavors required of you to assist her in leading a better life? Remember the seed does not germinate till it is buried — *hid-*

den in the ground— that is the first step for you to take."

The old man still remained silent. Something required Mrs. Grey's attention in the adjoining room, and while she was absent he took again his pipe, re-lighted it, and commenced smoking. When she returned she went on quietly with her preparations for supper; believing that silence would be more effectual than any farther conversation.

Patience, awed by her mother's unusually sober aspect, resumed her knitting. Uncle Mark drew a newspaper from his pocket, and began to read; but he soon dropped it; and laid aside his pipe, in an abstracted manner. Trip rustled and scratched the paper with great noise; and no one checked him, for each was deep in thought. But even he seemed very soon to be aware that quiet was best just now, and ceased his noisy play, seating himself demurely beside Uncle Mark.

No farther allusion was made to the amaranths. Their simple repast was ready in a few minutes. Mrs. Grey always made this the pleasantest meal of the day, and when, imme-

diately afterward, Uncle Mark took his leave, he went with a lighter heart than he had brought — though he had not mentioned the special trouble that weighed on his mind to-night — there was even a smile on his wrinkled and stern old face as he patted Pashie's cheek when he bade them all good-night.

"A little leaven," said Mrs. Grey to herself, as she closed the door after him. "But it may lead to large results."

The hectic from which Patience had been suffering was followed by extreme languor — she was glad to lay her weary head on her cool, soft pillow. But it was long before she fell asleep, thought and conjecture were so busy concerning Uncle Mark and Mary and the amaranths.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREYS.

AT one period of her life Mrs. Grey was in great affliction. She felt that no one could be called to more severe trials. And she came near to despair in the darkness that lowered so suddenly over her way. But through those trials her character had deepened and strengthened, her life had become more trustful, more earnest. And she had thereby reached such calm heights of fortitude and resignation that now, whatever were her surroundings, a quiet cheerfulness shone in every movement and accented every deed.

Latterly she had begun to fear that another trial was soon to be sent, and the hectic on

her daughter's thin cheeks filled her with dismay. But she resolved that even if her fears proved true, if she must drink that cup, it should not be bitter to her darling's lips. She had taught Patience long ago to have no dread of death, and were its shadow indeed approaching, still her remaining days should be made bright and happy.

More mature in understanding than most children, Patience had learned early of the life that knows no end, and loved to talk of a world better and more beautiful than this. Yet she was a genuine child, natural in all her tastes and desires. And, thoroughly enjoying the pastimes and occupations of childhood, she was buoyant and happy in all her little sports and tasks; yet thoughtful and sedate in matters that required more serious attention. Perhaps her quaint old fashioned name and its significance with which her mother had made her familiar, even in babyhood, had something to do with this womanly thoughtfulness.

Patience had never seen her father, but her mother had told her much about him. As fine a sailor as ever weighed anchor or cast a

ship's reckoning, he set sail one fine day on the homeward voyage from Europe. With more than his usual eagerness had he prepared for this return to his family; and many were the niceties and pretty baubles that he had purchased for them and stowed carefully away in his chest against his arrival; and frequently in imagination did he live over the welcome he should receive.

Mrs. Grey waited impatiently for her husband's coming, scanning with anxiety the daily papers for news of his arrival. After a while she turned every morning to the column of disasters. By and by his vessel's name was recorded under the head of *missing*; and hope was well-nigh paralyzed. But she did not, she could not, give him up; though with a breaking heart, tearfully and tenderly as if she were handling the garments of the dead, she laid away the clean linen, neat necktie, and what he called his land sman's suit, which she had made ready for immediate use.

Ere long the owners of the vessel sent her a letter of condolence, expressing their conviction that the ship had been wrecked in a violent

storm that occurred soon after she sailed. She tried to bear the tidings with submission, but she could not feel resigned — was nearly at the verge of distraction.

A few days afterward her little daughter was first laid in her arms. The sight of the helpless innocent, instead of increasing her grief as her friends feared, calmed and comforted her; and when one asked what she should call her child she meekly answered, "Patience."

"Don't for massy's sake drag her down with such a heavy name as that!" was the remonstrance of the well-meaning but officious woman. "Give her something light and airy, she's such a delicate little creetur. Lorindy-Samanthy, say, or Jerushy-Maria; or plain Huldy, that's a prettier name than Patience, and won't never go out of fashion."

But Mrs. Grey, though she thanked her kindly for her interest, did not change the baby's name. True she called her often "My treasure" or "My blessing;" but her name was *Patience.* And though she sometimes gave her the diminutive "Pashie," or when in her liveliest

moods "Pinkie," not one of them was so dear to her as *Patience.* It was to her mind the sign of that virtue of which she needed a large share for the burdens then laid upon her. And as often as she repeated the word her strength and courage seemed to increase, the misery of her lot to lessen, until at last smiles took the place of tears; and if occasionally a passing thought, or a heedless word spoken by others, brought back her grief, the sound of that name restored her to serenity.

When little Patience first learned to speak her own name her mother was thrilled with delight. Recalling the calm which the word had brought her own troubled heart during the first weeks of the baby's life she hoped that it might soon be so well-comprehended as to fill all her darling's days with serene content.

A handsome bright boy of eight years, named Daniel in memory of his grandfather, begged repeatedly during that trying first year to know why his father did not come home; and she invented all sorts of plausible stories to pacify him and to beguile her own sorrowful

heart. For Mrs. Grey could not feel that she was a widow; though often given that title she disliked being so called, even to this day. Whenever she spoke of their father to her children she alluded to the possibility of his return. Meanwhile they must make themselves worthy to bear his name and deserving of his commendation when he should come.

Her means were small, so about a year after the birth of Patience, she gave up the commodious house she had occupied, and took a neat cottage. Here she still lived. She arranged with such taste her plain but well-kept furniture and the ornaments and curiosities her husband had brought from foreign countries, that her children declared their home was the pleasantest in the village; and indeed they were right. Other homes had greater abundance and larger display of finery, but for real beauty and comfort, even this winter, when because of Patience's illness, her bed must be in the cosy little parlor, Mrs. Grey's excelled them all.

Thinking often of her husband as perhaps dependent upon the kindness and charity of strangers, her own heart went out quickly to

meet the lonely and desolate with a cheerful greeting — if need were, with substantial acts of benevolence; gladly giving of her small possessions, even at the cost of great self-denial, to promote the comfort of others. And more by her own example so constantly before them than by any words, her children learned to do the same.

Her boy passed with honor through his school-years. In order to give him a good education, she had seen the necessity of adding something to her income. This she did by sewing for the clothier; and with prudent forethought, though he was now able to earn his living, she continued the sewing. That this was a wise plan the expenses attendant upon Pashie's accident gave occasion for full proof.

Daniel, or *Dan*, as they usually called him, after leaving school worked at gardening with Uncle Mark at Mr. White's on Pleasant Hill. Dan was a smart lad and soon became an expert gardener. But when the Fairberg mines were discovered, having dipped a little into mineralogy — Dan like his father was an insa-

tiate reader — he became interested in the reports of their great extent and immense value.

"How strange and how full of excitement and adventure a miner's life must be!" he said to his mother. "It would just suit me I think."

"It is full of danger," she replied. "And it must be hard work — very hard work — delving day after day with pick and hammer."

"But I am used to hard work — enjoy it too. And I am very strong."

Dan was proud of his unusual size and strength. He had gained the *soubriquet* of young Hercules among the boys of the first class at school, and had added to these qualities by his labor in the open air.

"Dark and dreary and dirty it must be, down in the deep damp mines," said his mother.

"I shouldn't mind that. Every man has a lamp on his cap; and all the walls of those underground caves glitter with the bright, sparkling ore, I am told. O! they must look like fairy-land, or the palace of Aladdin."

Every day he had something new to tell of

the great quantities of ore taken out, or of the rich veins of silver just opened, and of the want of workmen at the mines. For the newspapers were full of the wonderful matter, and every man or lad who came from the city had heard of the extensive deposits and their incalculable value.

"But you know nothing of the business, my son, you don't understand using mining tools."

"I can soon learn; and I know I should enjoy handling them more than I do the spade and the rake. Why, I shouldn't be surprised if what I have learned of gardening should help me in mining. I should like to try at any rate. I wouldn't think of going to Colorado — so far away from you and Pashie. But Fairberg is so near — only three hours by rail you know."

Seeing him so determined his mother consented. And so, proud and happy, Dan went to the hard rough work, and the still rougher fare that he knew he must expect in the rude lodging-houses that had been hastily put up near the mines. But he was beginning life — he was going to begin as a man — and

he meant to be manly and brave; with his mother's watchword *patience* — and her bright example in mind, he could endure great hardships.

Though Mrs. Grey parted cheerfully from her boy, it must be confessed that both she and Patience mourned not a little during the first week of his absence. But he sent them such an entertaining letter at the end of that time, and followed it every week by one of the same sort, brimming over with boyish happiness, that they were now quite reconciled to the loss of his society.

This weekly letter was always anticipated with much pleasure, not only by themselves but by Uncle Mark, who took great pride in Dan, considering him one of his boys as he called all those whom he had taught to use the dibble and the pruning-knife. And he was not a little disappointed that the letter, usually so prompt, had not yet arrived. But the amaranths had served to interest Mrs. Grey and Patience; and the conversation to which they had led, had driven for the present all thoughts of Dan from the old man's mind,

while it recalled to Mrs. Grey the letter that Uncle Mark had received from his daughter about a month previous, and what he had told her at that time when he brought it for her to read. Previous to this he had been very reticent of his affairs. And Mrs. Grey disliked gossip. Hence, until that day, she had only known that the solitary old man had a daughter living somewhere who had caused him much unhappiness. His small cottage, so full of odd repairs that its original style was no longer apparent, stood next her own modest little house, so near that she could not help knowing his forlorn condition; and knowing, it was her nature to pity, and to strive by many a word of sympathy and many a deed of kindness to cheer and encourage him. Yet she made no remarks and asked no curious questions.

That letter he took to this good neighbor, saying:

"We've been friends a long spell, Mrs. Grey. Pretty nigh ten years — isn't it?"

"Yes; nearly ten years, Uncle Mark."

"Well, so I thought. And you've treated

me very handsomely. Never asked any questions. I can't say the same of a good many other folks, but I don't call names. Minded your own business, and been neighborly and friendly too, times and times again. And I want to speak my mind. Ain't too free — am I?"

"Oh, no, certainly not; say what you please, neighbor," returned Mrs. Grey.

"It's about my little girl," he said, in a quavering voice. "There — first see what she's written."

Mary Weston had written to beg her father's pardon for all the anxiety and sorrow she had ever caused him, and to ask if she might come back to her old home, promising to be always a kind and dutiful daughter if he would grant these requests.

"Shan't do it," he said, shutting his teeth together firmly. And as Mrs. Gray returned him the letter he drew his old cap over his eyes and then crowded the offensive document into his breast-pocket growling, "It wouldn't last a week. She's been gone eleven years."

"This isn't the first you have heard?"

asked Mrs. Grey, timidly, fearing to be too inquisitive.

"No, no. Those new boots—" he set his feet forward to display them—"those new boots she sent last fall. A-h-h-h! I didn't want em—not from *her*. And there's socks—and handkerchiefs, and things. They've been a coming more than a year. Why didn't she send before? that's the question—before Phebe went? Well, if she'd come then, when Phebe first died, I wouldn't have said *No*. It's too late now." And he shook his head and kicked the unwelcome new boots against an unoffending foot-rest near by—as if he would gladly rid himself of them.

"Too late?" exclaimed Mrs. Grey. "Uncle Mark, it is never too late to do right!"

"Yes it is—if you mean I'd ought to say yes to that letter. You'd think so yourself if you knew all. A-h-h!"

"Tell me all then."

"Well, I will." The old cap was removed from his heated brow—at Mrs. Grey's suggestion—and the heavy overcoat laid aside. Then he resumed his story:

"Well; Phebe and I were mighty fond of that little girl. She was all we had, you see and we set a sight by her, There were three little fellows first, one after another. But they took the croup, two of 'em, in one week: then the other one, he had to go too. Bright as a new button he was — 'twas awful hard to give him up — the last, you know. 'Croup?' Yes; he had it too. That was Jamie. Will and Harry we called the others. Then Mary came. Oh my! Wasn't Phebe pleased because it was a girl! Pretty creature she was too, and grew prettier and brighter every day of her life. Just such eyes and hair as Pashie's; but stouter and ruggeder, she was. And had a nice voice too. O my sakes! how she used to sing. Pashie 'minds me of her sometimes; clear as a robin — just as sweet as —"

Something troubled his throat. He hemmed and coughed; then rose, walked to the window and looked out a few minutes.

Taking his seat again, he said:

"'Twas the plaguey theatre-folks made the mischief. She wasn't easy a day after they'd been here. I didn't think there was anything

out of the way, though, nor Phebe either, when she wanted to pay a visit to Aunt Hannah — she lives in town, you know. We let her go. But — there 'twas — we heard about it afterwards. She didn't go near Hannah — went right to be a *ballay-girl.* I suppose you know what *they* are — singing and dancing in tights and spangles at the theatre — miserable, mean things."

"No;" Mrs. Grey did not know — had never seen anything of the kind.

"Well, you're better off than I am, if you can say that, Mrs. Grey. And that's what she was — my little Mary. Oh my sakes! A-h-h!"

"How old was she?" asked Mrs. Grey.

"Only twelve. Tall, though; and straight as an arrow. You'd have said she looked fifteen. Smart, too, as a steel-trap; could do 'most as much as her mother. And Phebe was a powerful, smart woman till after Mary went. She wasn't herself — never — after that. Died, you know, the first year you lived here. And I haven't been good for anything since."

"O yes, you have uncle. You manage the

squire's garden well; and you do a great many neighborly chores."

"O law! That's nothing. I could do something once, though," and he stirred the frosty hair from his temples, and then stroked it back again with an air of pride.

"Mrs. Grey," he continued, "it's the shame — the shame of it." His voice trembled pitifully. "All these years, and everybody knowing of it. Sometimes I wish I could drop out of sight for good and all. Yes, yes. Ah-h me!"

"Don't let that trouble you. No one thinks less of you for any misconduct of Mary's," rejoined Mrs. Grey. "But why not take her at her word, and let her come home? You lead too lonely a life. She could do much to make you comfortable. If you were sick, would nurse you tenderly, no doubt."

"Sha'n't do it. Can take care of myself. There's the workhouse if I do get sick. I expect to go there some day or other," he muttered.

"Is Mary still at the theatre? All this time?"

"Well, no; not now. Hannah found her out after Phebe died. A lady, one of the grandees, liked Mary's looks, and took her before then, and made a lady of her. And I suppose she's there, now. That's where the presents and things come from. Do you think I'd touch 'em if they were bought with theatre-money, Mrs. Grey? Eheu?"

"Then why not say she may return? If she has been a daughter to the lady who so kindly received her — stranger, though she was — she will now be a faithful child to you, I think."

"I can't believe so. If she wouldn't come when her mother died, she shan't come now. No, no, no."

Mrs. Grey had no farther argument. It was evident that the obstinate old man, while ostensibly seeking advice, only wished for her approval of his inflexible severity. This she could not give. But since that morning she had borne the subject in mind, hoping for an opportunity to set it in such a light that he would relent. The amaranths had furnished

her with a topic for more serious talk, which he had received more kindly than she had anticipated, giving her a strong hope that through those flowers a reconciliation might be effected.

CHAPTER III.

PASHIE'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

"MOTHER," said Patience the next morning, "I can't keep these pretty flowers. Uncle Mark ought to have given them to his daughter. I think she would be glad to see them; I know I should, if I had been away from home as long as she has. I mean to ask him if I may send them to her when John White goes to the city."

"When will John go? Are you sure he is going? I haven't heard that he had a thought of it."

"Alice said yesterday he is going to get a situation to learn engraving. He has been wanting to go this great while. His father has

promised at last that he may begin with the new year. He is to take a day soon to go in and find a suitable place. Won't it be a good plan to send the flowers by him? He knows where Mary lives."

"A very good plan, Pinkie. But we must consult Uncle Mark first. He is very sensitive in regard to Mary. We must do nothing to wound his feelings."

"Yes. But I hope he won't object. Would n't it be nice for her to come at Christmas, and stay always with him; and be kind to him. And then he wouldn't be so dull and unhappy. She'd be so glad too to come home. She'd be in to see us often — don't you think so?"

"Most likely, if she fancies us. I should be glad to see her — to know her."

"We feel lonely sometimes, since Dan's gone, don't we mother dear? And she must be lonely. But when I get better I can run in to Uncle Mark's, after she comes."

"We'll see, we'll see, Pinkie. I wouldn't think so much about Uncle Mark, or his Mary, it worries you. Let's look at Dan's mitten,

we want the pair finished soon, you know."

"Oh! it is nearly half-done; isn't it?" She drew her knitting from a gay-colored chintz bag that hung beside her chair, and as she spoke held it for inspection.

"Not quite. I've an errand down town. You may knit while I am gone. Don't hurry, dear. Perhaps I shall have time to help you this afternoon. I'll finish it if you are not able."

"Ah, but I am! You don't know how nicely I feel to-day! I'm going to get better just as fast as I can, so as to go down to Krall's store next week. And I shall knit just all I can. Trip needn't go with you — need he?"

Trip was frisking around and wagging his tail in high glee. He knew from the bonnet and cloak she was putting on that Mrs. Grey was going out and he wanted to get into the street whenever the door was opened.

"No. Trip musn't go. I can't be troubled with him this morning. No, sir, no! I expect you to take good care of Patience."

He ceased wagging his tail and for an instant

dropped his ears. Then, as if comprehending her words, he walked soberly to the window and took his accustomed seat.

"That's right, old fellow. Good Trip!" said Patience, fondling his shaggy head and neck. "We'll get along well together. Mother, Uncle Mark thinks dogs are better than human beings. Isn't that a strange idea?"

"Not very. He means, I suppose, in the strong attachments they form for those who treat them kindly; and in the interest they often manifest for the welfare of their owners. But it won't do for me to stop here talking. I must be about my business."

During the night there had been a great change in the weather. The sun was obscured by clouds, the wind blew from the north and was freezing cold — cold as if it came directly from Greenland's icy mountains. Mrs. Grey's water-proof, even with its hood drawn over her bonnet, was scarcely sufficient to keep her from shivering as she hurried down the street. But she did not mind, she knew Patience was comfortable in their snug little parlor; and she never felt concerned about

her own discomfort as long as health was not endangered.

Sharp and biting, the wind rushed down the alleys and around the corners. Men with stout, thick overcoats buttoned up to the chin, fur caps pulled closely over their ears, and well-gloved hands thrust into pockets, bustled past or jostled against her without one word of apology. Children, rosy with the keen air, defended from the cold by warm coats and scarfs and mittens, trotted schoolwards — satchels and dinner-baskets slung across their shoulders — enjoying the exhilaration of the frosty morning and the prospect of snow; laughing and shouting gleefully when a gust more than usually powerful prostrated one of their number, or set him reeling rapidly forward. Now and then she passed or met a young lady, who strove with many a frown to hide the chagrin she felt at the unceremonious treatment of the rude wind. But not one familiar face did she recognize. Face? *nose*, I should say, for that important feature was alone conspicuous enough to be recognized amid the mufflings and wraps everybody had donned.

She hastened on till she saw Krall's great gilt sign; and the piles of empty boxes upon the pavement in front made her sure that here were plenty of goods for Christmas presents.

She stopped, only a moment however, for time with her was precious, and gazed at the gayly decorated and crowded windows. A few rods beyond was a jewelry store. This she entered. Fortunately, as she thought, no one but the proprietor was in; for she felt some delicacy about the errand on which she had come. Advancing to the counter she drew forth her purse, and taking thence a brooch set with garnets asked the man its value.

He named a small sum. It was much less than she expected. With a look of disappointment she put it again in her purse, and turned, as if to leave the store.

"Stop a minute, Mrs. Grey," said he. "Do you wish to sell that brooch?"

"Yes, sir. It is of no use to me, Mr. Browning. I may as well turn it to good account."

"Let me weigh it," he rejoined. "Perhaps I can give you more."

He weighed it, examined the jewels more

closely, and then offered twice the sum he had named. Satisfied with this price, the bargain was soon concluded; and, unaware that Mr. Browning — who was a very benevolent man — believing that actual want must have induced her to part with it, had given her a great deal more than the brooch was worth, she retraced her steps to Krall's.

Entering quickly, she was for an instant bewildered by the quantity and variety of toys and knickknacks that in every place and in every possible position met her gaze. A whole menagerie of animals flanked the right-hand window. At the left were dolls and babies of every description — from the gaily-dressed waxen young lady down to the rubber baby in its night-gown. There, too, were all sorts of furniture and utensils they were supposed to need, and all sorts of vehicles for the use and conveyance of the dolls, as well as an innumerable variety of trinkets and baubles that girls generally like to call their own. Besides all these there were miniature tools and machines and contrivances — an endless multitude — for the especial delight of boys. It

seemed as if every child had been thought of in its peculiar tastes and fancies, and the whole wide world had been ransacked in order to supply each with a suitable gift.

Mrs. Grey ran her eye over the collection again and again, unable to decide what her purchase should be. Finally she began to examine one of the famous walking-dolls of which Patience had spoken. While thus occupied, her attention was called off by the harsh words of a salesman—"No. We've nothing for you. We hear such stories every day. We are not to be imposed upon, I tell you."

She looked around. At her side stood a sad-faced woman with a sleeping baby in her arms and a little boy clinging to her thin, faded shawl.

"As sure as there is a God in heaven I am speaking the truth," said the woman. "And it's not for myself—I'm not afraid of the worst. It's for the children. Not a mouthful of bread have they tasted since yesterday noon. And I haven't a penny in my pocket, nor a place to shelter them this cold day."

"Away! off! out with you! I can't have my customers incommoded by such vagabonds," rejoined the man indignantly, waving and thrusting his hands towards the door.

Flushing and then paling rapidly the woman took her boy by his little bare red hand, and dragging him, reluctant to leave, passed into the street.

Mrs. Grey's sympathies were instantly aroused. For the moment everything was forgotten save these poor outcasts and their distress. She had noticed that though shabby, their clothing was clean and whole. This to her was proof enough of their worthiness. The toys were laid down and she immediately followed the woman. Making a few enquiries she took the baby from its mother's arms and bade them come with her. "You shall at least be made comfortable for this day," she said. "I have a warm room and decent food that you may share."

"Oh! heaven bless you! heaven bless you for your kind words," said the woman joyfully; "the first I've had for so many weary weeks — since James my good man died."

Mrs. Grey hurried on. She could not stop to listen to her thanks for the younger child seemed benumbed with cold, and the little boy as if half-famished, was gnawing a bit of frozen apple which he had snatched from the gutter.

Still the woman kept up an indistinct murmur about herself, "Ellen Alison," and her gratitude; the tears running down her cheeks as she followed her benefactress, the boy trotting behind. Everybody turned aside with amused looks to let the queer group pass; and very soon Mrs. Grey with these new acquaintances was at home.

As they entered, Patience opened her large eyes wide with astonishment, and Trip set up his loudest barks and growls.

"Be quiet, Trip! these are friends," said his mistress. The dog ceased his noise and ran toward the boy, he forgetting cold and hunger began to frolic with him to the great delight of Patience, while the woman gazed in silence.

"These are new friends, Pashie dear; and this, your Christmas present that I found at

Krall's," and Mrs. Grey put the baby in her lap.

The child was now thoroughly awake. Patience took off its miserable little hood! while her mother brought it a cup of milk, and then bread and meat and coffee for Ellen and the boy. And she was much amused to see how eagerly the baby drank the milk. Then she smoothed its curling auburn hair, and admired its blue eyes and its cunning little fingers, as it pointed and picked at the pretty pink flowers on the cup.

Scarcely a word was said till the strangers had eaten all that was set before them. Then Mrs. Grey asked a few questions. From the replies she gathered that the woman's husband had been an accountant in Liverpool. His health failing, he converted his small property into money and came to America. He had a letter to a firm in Halifax who employed him a while. But his disease increased rapidly after crossing the ocean, and in less than a year he died. Since then — his sickness and burial having swallowed up nearly all the money — she had endeavored to find a situa-

tion to assist in some farmer's family where her children would not be unwelcome. She had dreaded the winter — during the last two months had been travelling from town to town as best she could, directing her course southward; and was nearly discouraged now, no one wishing for her services, everybody eyeing her suspiciously till she met Mrs. Grey.

Her last penny was spent the day previous, and this morning, for the first time in her life, she had begged — just for one penny to satisfy her boy's hunger. She had asked at several doors, and met only denial — "We have nothing for tramps. Go to the station." She had stopped at Krall's fine store, thinking that his business brought him so near to children he would certainly take pity on her little ones. With what result is already known.

"Now, mother," said Patience, after listening intently to the whole story, "I think she ought to stay with us. Don't you? She can have Dan's room this winter; and while you are out she'll be company for me. Besides, the baby is my Christmas present, you said; of course, she must stay. And I shall like it a

hundred times better — a real live baby — than a doll — a walking doll, even. I wish Mrs. White and the girls hadn't gone so soon. I should like to have them see the darling."

"But, my dear daughter, the care of a baby requires a great deal of patience and a great deal of time. And its mother won't be able to earn anything at present to pay for food and clothes. Think how much it will cost to feed and clothe them all. How can we keep them?"

"Yes, yes, mother dear. I know it will take a sight of money to buy milk and meat for them. But they can have the dresses that I have out-grown — their mother and I can fix them. I know we can get along somehow. God takes care of the widow and the fatherless, you often say, and He'll help us some way or other." And the sick girl's cheeks glowed and her eyes shone like stars.

"It shall be as you say," replied Mrs. Grey, who had only raised objections in order to test her generosity. "It will require great economy and diligence, and some self-denial. But I guess we are equal to it. And I don't believe

we shall be sorry for trying to help the poor things. They shall stay a few weeks, at any rate."

"You shall neither of you ever be sorry for helping me or my children. James Alison's wife and little ones shall always do you honor, for the sake of his blessed memory. Whatever I can turn my hand to I'll rejoice to do, to serve you," said the baby's mother.

Seeing the mitten on which Patience had been knitting, she added, "My lady at the Hall taught me to knit when I was a child. I'd take joy in doing this." And round and round the glittering needles flew in her fingers while her face was wreathed with smiles.

Mrs. Grey went to search for warmer clothing — "the children need it," she said, and there were some things in her and Pashie's wardrobe that they could have as well as not.

The happy, cooing baby was still in Pashie's lap. The boy — "Tommy" — his mother called him, was romping with Trip. Mrs. Grey was absent from the room some time, but when she returned her arms were filled — "If this or

that wouldn't do, something else should—she'd manage somehow"—she had said to herself, as she rummaged through closets and drawers.

CHAPTER IV.

PLEASANT SURPRISES.

DELIGHTED to be of use Mrs. Alison knit on, saying nothing, but pausing occasionally in her work to give Tommy's chubby hands a slight rap with her needles whenever his frolic with Trip became too uproarious.

But the boy's play came to a sudden end, and the baby started in affright, at a loud knock and yet louder voice at the door enquiring for the widow Grey.

Mrs. Grey answered the summons.

A loaded coal-cart stood near and a smutty-faced man asked where the coal should be put.

"I have ordered none," she said. "My coal isn't out. It must belong to somebody else."

Mr. Browning sent me here, told me to leave it, ma'am. And I must."

A grocer's cart came hurrying along. "Make room for me, Jerry, I'm in a tearing hurry," said the young man who held the reins." "These goods must be delivered immediately." Turning to Mrs. Grey, he gave her a note, "From Mr. Browning and he's coming, to explain."

Mrs. Grey took the slip of paper, read it, and in an agitated voice bade the coal-man pass to the shed; then led the way for the grocer and his bundles to her tidy little kitchen. He had brought flour, potatoes, a ham, and a variety of smaller stores altogether a larger collection of eatables than she had seen in her pantry for some time.

Patience was all excitement. "How came Mr. Browning to send them? He never did so before. I didn't know he knew us, mother. What does it mean?"

"We have often been told of his benevo-

lence, Pashie. Perhaps he thinks we need help, because I sold him my brooch this morning."

"Your brooch — your garnet brooch? Why, mother! What for?"

Then came an account of her mother's plan for buying a Christmas present and why it wasn't bought.

"Well, then, of course, mother dear, you have the money, and it must be used for this baby. *She* is the present. And it's all happened just right exactly. What could we do with so many good things as Mr. Browning has sent if these poor folks hadn't come to share 'em?"

To this Mrs. Grey gave a smiling reply and began turning over the clothing she had brought forward for the children. There was one woolen dress that Ellen (as Mrs. Alison wished to be called) said she could soon make tidy and comfortable for herself, though now it was much out of repair. Two smaller garments, by a little cutting and contriving, would answer for the baby. But there was nothing suitable for the six-year-old boy; and

for this Mrs. Grey expressed great regret, because Tommy's trousers were already hoisting a signal of distress in their rear on account of Trip's rude, though playful claws.

"Not a word!" ejaculated Ellen. "Not one word more. The baby couldn't wear both at once, and the bigger one is just the figure of Tommy, 'bating the length. And a very nice frock for him it is, ma'am,"

"But Tommy doesn't need a frock. He must have trousers and a jacket."

"Never mind, ma'am. The queen's boy might be glad of this nice frock. Look ye! It's easy to make a girl of him and I will."

Suiting the action to the word she lifted Tommy to her knee and began smoothing his yellow, wavy locks; then parted them prettily over his broad, white forehead, and he did look as handsome a girl as one would wish to see.

Mrs. Grey laughed, and Patience too, at this comical adjustment of the trouble. Good-natured Mrs. Alison joined with them, shaking her head knowingly as she kept on strok-

ing his hair till the little fellow begged for release.

"Do as you please," observed Mrs. Grey. "I have no time to help you. But here are needles and thread; and Patience may sew a little. Not much, though, she isn't strong."

"Indeed, and that's easy to see, with those thin fingers and the holy look in those eyes. I can sew fast and well; for the young ladies at the Hall taught me many nice stitches, and many's the fine dress I finished and trimmed for my mistress and her daughters. But don't you wish for the mitten? It's very small work to finish it now. I'd like to complete it, to the very top — thumb and all, if you please." Holding up the knitting she waited a reply.

It was indeed but small work to finish the mitten now. They were both amazed to see what progress she had made. The baby was fast asleep. Mrs. Grey laid her on Patience's bed, and bade Mrs. Alison go on with the knitting.

But Patience said Tommy's frock ought to be made, and she could knit while his mother

fitted it. This arrangement was made. Then Mrs. Grey was ready to begin her usual day's sewing. She drew her chair toward Patience, near the window.

"Now, Pinkie," she said, unfolding a half-finished vest, and rapidly threading a needle, "now I'm ready for our usual dish of talk. Let me hear about Mrs. White's call."

"Oh! yes. I've been wanting to tell you about it. John *is* going to the city, perhaps to-morrow; and can take the amaranths to Mary. Mrs. White thinks Uncle Mark can't refuse to let me send them. I shall ask him this evening.

"There's to be a Christmas tree at the school-room, and a great many have been invited. She says I may go if you are willing — Alice and Edith are going. They are out to-day buying things to make into presents to hang on the tree. They say it will look splendid, and everybody'll have an elegant time. It's a week to Christmas. I should admire to go. Don't you think I'll be well enough? May I if I am."

"We'll see, we'll see," replied Mrs. Grey

thoughtfully. "Suppose we should have a Christmas festival here, how would that do? Couldn't you enjoy it as much as going there?"

"I don't know. Why, how could we in this small room?" And with something like incredulity in her blue eyes Patience glanced around the little parlor.

"Very easily. Only get Uncle Mark's consent for Mary's return, and we might have a nice time."

"So we could! Why, mother dear, he'd help us! We could have wreaths and trimmings if we didn't have a tree, and they'd last longer than a tree. It would be just as beautiful as — as —" she could think of no comparison, but clapped her hands for joy.

Absorbed in her employment Mrs. Alison paid no attention to the conversation, but now, looking up pleasantly, Mrs. Grey told the cause of her daughter's great delight.

"Oh, and indeed, ma'am! That would be lovely. And, if you'll give me leave, I'll be very quick to help you. The blessed Master

and all the saints in glory would be glad to look in on such a heavenly scene as that—when the old man lifts the great stone of his trouble out of his heart and takes in again the poor, penitent soul."

"Well, you shall share with us, Ellen, if we have that happiness. I'm not sure that we can persuade Uncle Mark. He's very set in his ways."

"Never you fear, jewel. It's the flowers will do the business. There's a power of meaning in the blossoms, and it will all come to him. He can't stand against it, if he once looks on the poor girl's face again."

Trip barked merrily and springing from Tommy's arms rushed toward the door. The latch was lifted, rattled—some one was coming in—Uncle Mark's burly presence entered.

"The very person whom we wanted to see!" cried Patience, "A letter, too. Look, mother!" (she held up what he had playfully tossed into her hands.) "I knew Dan hadn't forgotten to write. Oh, please, your scissors."

The envelope was rapidly cut, and from the folded paper within a nice new bank-note

fluttered to the floor. She did not heed the money. With trembling, hurrying fingers she opened the paper, her mother, dropping work and thread and thimble, came and hung over her shoulder. They both perused the precious lines in silence, the color coming and going in Pashie's cheeks with fearful rapidity.

Uncle Mark seated himself at a respectful distance from the strangers. But Tommy — unwilling to lose Trip's company, who, as usual gamboled about the old man for a kind greeting, soon found a welcome seat on Uncle Mark's knee; and went on with the unintelligible jargon with which the dog had been long edified — chatter which Mrs. Grey and Patience had not attempted to understand.

Amused by the boy's gestures, and having tried, in vain, to make out any sort of words, much less *sense*, from the gibberish, Uncle Mark burst into a hearty laugh.

At so unusual a sound from his lips Patience and her mother looked up in amazement.

"Ain't he a queer chap, though?" said he. "All the bobolinks and blackbirds in creation couldn't get ahead of him. And

what in the world it all means passes my finding out. Where'd you pick him up?"

"Oh; down town," Mrs. Grey said, very quietly. "They all came together." And she glanced at the mother and the baby.

"They are our Christmas presents, only a little beforehand," said Patience.

"Do tell! Is that so?" he rejoined, with great surprise.

Mrs. Grey nodded assent.

"Well, I never! Mrs. Grey, you do beat all. You don't mean you've gone and took 'em into your home for good and all?"

"Certainly, for the present, at least, and as long as they choose to stay," she answered.

"Well, well; well, well; you've got an uncommon share of good feelings, I know," he returned. "But I never supposed you'd let them carry you such a stretch as that makes. Then you never knew them before? Well, well." He scratched his ear and rubbed the few hairs on his bald pate vigorously, as if searching for a proper conclusion. "Bless you!" he ejaculated at last. "But what a

risk — what a terrible risk you run! Eheu!" He dropped the boy from his lap.

"Uncle Mark," said Patience, hastily, seeing Mrs. Alison's confusion at his plain speech; "don't you want to read Dan's letter? See — he's sent mother ten dollars. Isn't he a good boy?" She held up the bright new greenback.

"Of course I want to read it. But it's no more than I expected; he's always been a good boy, Dan has. Let me get my eyes." He took his glasses from his vest-pocket, adjusted them carefully, and, having satisfied himself that the bank-bill was genuine — "There's so many false ones, I mistrust 'em all," he remarked, and then settled himself to read.

"He does write a handsome hand — that's a fact, just like a school-master. What — what? '*Warm as June down in the mines.*' That's odd. '*Should get along too fast if I had been used to the tools.*' Always was spry's a cat — do more in one day than some boys in three. '*No end to the ore.*' Hope not yet awhile, if he wants to follow that trade. '*Tons*

and tons of silver and lead ready to be smelted.' Why don't they smelt it then? '*It isn't quite so bright as I supposed in the galleries.*' No I guess not. It's darker than Egypt down there, I've no doubt. '*Rather damp.*' Of course it is. What were those pumps for he told about in the last letter? '*Man sick with rheumatism; I gave him the blanket I bought.*' Just like him. '*I've heard that a newspaper laid on the bed is as good as a blanket, and I found it nice and warm last night.*' I don't believe that. Send him my blanket, Mrs. Grey. My old cloak will cover my bed. That'll do for me. Poor fellow! He shan't put up with a newspaper. '*Ten dollars for mother a new dress.*' I wonder if mother ever spent so much for a dress? But you ought to, now, Mrs. Grey. Better buy a silk gown and be a lady right off."

Mrs. Grey smiled — a proud happy smile it was — her boy had been so kind to the sick man, that was the meaning of her smile. Glad, too, she was, that he had been so thoughtful of her. But she hadn't the least intention of spending the whole of that money on herself.

"'*Hope Pashie's as well as ever now.*' Well, no;" the bald head was shaken dubiously. "Almost, though," he added, catching her imploring glance. "'*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you all, Uncle Mark, especially. Tell the old gentleman I often think of him.*' Does he? Eheu! I thought most likely he'd forget about me before now."

"Now uncle!" cried Patience. "How could you—how could you think so of our Dan!"

"Well, well. O my sakes! Because—because it's human nature. That's how."

"That's not my boy's nature," said Mrs. Grey, with a slight quiver in her voice.

The old man was embarrassed. He took off his glasses, drew his handkerchief from his pocket, swept his face with it, wiped the glasses furtively, swept his face again, whisked the handkerchief out of sight, and had the glasses once more in place all within half a minute. Then went on reading—in silence, now.

"Read aloud, uncle, please." It was Mrs. Grey who spoke, and in her natural tones.

Uncle Mark cleared his throat and began again.

"'*You and Pashie must do all you can to keep him cheerful, he's so lonely.*' Bless his heart! So I am. Nobody else would have thought of it, though."

Out came the handkerchief — only to rub the wart on his nose this time. "Here's a postscript: '*The sick man is named White — says he is Mr. White's brother Ralph.*' Ralph White! How in the world came he to the mines? '*I didn't know Mr. White had a brother.*' I don't suppose he did. He hasn't been in these parts for years — Ralph hasn't. '*Merry Christmas once more.*'

"Now that's a first rate letter, according to my way of thinking. None of your whining about hard work and cold weather and mean victuals. He's a brave one — he is; and I'm proud of him. You know I've had something to do with the finishing off of your boy, Mrs. Grey?"

Mrs. Grey assented.

"He knows how to take things, and ain't afraid of hardships. However, I should like

to see him, and talk all these things over. I wish the chap could come home at Christmas. Don't you Mrs. Grey?"

"Yes, surely. I should be delighted to have him with us then. But as he can't come he must make the best of it, and we too. He must find his happiness that day in making those who are with him happy. And we can have enjoyment in pleasing those who can be with us at Christmas."

She paused, as if for reply. Uncle Mark in an abstracted manner folded and re-folded the letter, but said nothing.

Mrs. Grey continued — "Our own relatives, those who are, or who ought to be, our dearest, it is perfectly right to consider first at that time; but the sad and the sorrowing, whoever they may be, and wherever they are, should have especial consideration then."

Mrs. Alison made a personal application of that remark and looked up with a grateful smile.

"Oh! We are going to have the jolliest, happiest Christmas that ever was — that ever we had, I mean," said Patience nervously.

(She couldn't wait till evening to make her request, as she had intended.) "Even if Dan can't be with us. That is, if you will help us, uncle."

"Me? child, I ain't good for anything. But, there, you needn't mind me. I always get glum those days, and want to crawl off to the darkest hole, I can — don't care to see anybody nor anything. A-h-h!"

"Well, then *we* can't have it. Oh, dear, I'm dreadful — *dreadful* sorry!" She seemed just ready to cry. "It all depends on you, uncle. And, oh, it might be so nice!" Down went the knitting-needles from her busy fingers. The mitten was thrust hastily aside, and she hid her face in her hands. But, as if recollecting herself, she suddenly started and made an attempt to rise. The effort cost her great pain. A ghastly pallor overspread her face, and she sank again to her chair.

"What is it, dear?" asked her mother tenderly, while both Uncle Mark and Mrs. Alison came forward in great concern.

"Oh! the old pain again. I thought it was gone, and I might walk like other folks.

It's going off, now; don't worry. I'll be all right in a minute. I was going to get my amaranths. I can't bear to have to sit still and be waited on so much;" and the big tears she had tried so hard to restrain rolled down her cheeks.

"*Patience*, Patience, my dear child. You must wait a while yet," said her mother, taking the amaranths from a vase on the mantle-piece. She laid them on a little stand at Pashie's side and then re-arranged her pillows.

"Dear mother!" replied Patience, kissing the troubled forehead bending over her. "Shall I ever half-pay you for all you do for me?"

"I am over-paid, my daughter, in your love," she returned. "In your love and obedience."

Tommy, attracted by the bright hues of the flowers, endeavored to appropriate them. His mother quickly diverted his attention and then Patience took them. Looking at them intently she said—"They have a holy meaning, I think. Don't you, mother? The

crimson ones seem like God's love to us; and the white ones are like the white robes of the saints in Heaven. I thought of that yesterday when Uncle Mark spoke of the rainbow."

"That's a very pleasant fancy," remarked her mother, quietly. "Do you notice the crown of golden stars — very bright it is on the larger ones? That reminds me of the starry crown which is prepared for 'him that overcometh.'"

"'Him that overcometh!' How hard it is to know about that," observed Uncle Mark, very seriously. "I never can tell whether I have or not. It's mighty tough work to struggle through the world. Leastways, I've found it so. A-h-h! Some days I wish it was all over, and old Mark Weston laid away in the graveyard, no more trouble to anybody and no more hard knocks for him."

"Don't say that!" exclaimed Mrs. Grey. "We all have a cross to bear before we can gain that crown. But we needn't, and we ought not, to make it any heavier by our perversity."

"Ah, well. It's amazing dreary here, if it's all glory yonder," he muttered.

"That all depends upon the road you are taking, my James used to say," interposed Mrs. Alison, who had been an interested listener. "He often told me to keep a clean conscience, and there'd be peace and light all the way to the pearly gates. And, indeed, it is only *our own miserable self* that cheats us out of our share of those blessings. There would be neither darkness nor dreariness for any of us, but for the trouble we heap up in our hearts."

"You are right, Ellen," said Mrs. Grey. "And I believe Uncle Mark is of the same opinion. If he would only acknowledge it now, and throw off his trouble, he would find happiness once more."

Uncle Mark frowned, twirled his thumbs vigorously, and trotted his right foot. He was deep in meditation, but Tommy thought the movement of the foot an invitation for a ride upon his knee, and was ready to perch himself there. His mother hastily drew him away.

After a slight pause Mrs. Grey continued — "It takes a great deal of resolution at first. But, uncle, you are not wanting in that, nor in energy either, for common affairs. Why need you be in this matter of higher importance?"

Bless your heart, neighbor, I don't know. But I wish I could be as chipper as you are. Blow high or blow low — it's all the same to you — just as merry as a grig through it all."

"It is as Ellen says — you musn't carry such a heap of trouble in your heart."

"A-h-h! I can't get rid of it — wish I could — " there was impatience both in looks and accents.

"Yes, you can," replied Mrs. Grey. "If you are only willing to hope and trust you will find the burden gone, and will wonder that you ever harbored it. Now let us have our Christmas as it should be, Uncle Mark, peaceful and happy. Let us have freer confidence in our fellow-men, greater patience and forbearance with those who injure us, more pity for the erring, and a firmer faith in God's

promises; and, above all, a cheerful hope for brighter and better days, with a determination to do all that lies in our power to bring forward those brighter and better days."

"And, oh, please let Mary come home!" said Patience hurriedly, frightened at her own boldness. "And please, too, let me give her these amaranths. John White will carry them."

For a moment there was painful silence.

A purple hue stole into Uncle Mark's face. He drew his hand confusedly across his forehead two or three times; hemmed, began a growl but changed it to a hoarse cough; fidgetted in his chair, then, gruffly — but making a great effort to soften his tones — replied:

"It ain't for me to say anything now about the amaralds. They are your own, Pashie. I gave them to you — to do with them what you please. But I did think I should like to see them in your mantel-vase, along with the shells and the china jars. But, after all, it won't matter much — no great. I'm never going to cross *you*, anyhow."

"Then Mary may come! And we'll have

the spruce and the wreaths and all!" she cried exultingly.

"I didn't promise any such thing," said the old man sullenly. "*Not that*, only do as you like with the amaralds."

"I think that when we send the amaranths I shall invite Mary to spend Christmas with me," remarked Mrs. Grey. "You can't object to that uncle."

"I suppose I mustn't," was the reluctant answer.

"That's enough to make us all happy," she rejoined. "For you will come, of course — you always have these last six years — though not very willingly."

"Mrs. Grey you know I only come for my dinner. I'm always so peaking and gloomy then; I won't worry anybody more than I can't help. My unhappiness such times — " his voice was low and husky — "don't agree with other folks' feelings."

"That's to be a happy day for you as well as for us," said Patience, in bright, cheery tones. "You'll help us get ready for it, won't you, uncle?"

"I can't do anything," was the response, with a gloomy shake of his head, but with a quick, sharp snap of his fingers that brought Trip to his knee. Fondling the dog's glossy neck, he continued — "Spruce fixings — do you mean?"

"Yes, sir. You know where the evergreen grows; Alice said so yesterday. We shall want lots of that, and noble pine and bear's-foot."

"Yes; that's so. Trip! Good dog. Down sir, down! What a docile creature he is — minds every word you say. Well, it's natural for dogs. They ain't wilful — not much — not like other folks."

Mrs. Grey laid down her sewing, and looking up with a sad, steady gaze at Uncle Mark, said — "Docility *is* a virtue — twin-sister to meekness, I think. It is seldom wanting where patience and a loving trust bear rule."

She had learned to read the old man's thoughts, and knew what had prompted that last remark.

"There are pine-trees and hemlocks over in the pasture," said Patience. "I can see them from my window. I wish we could have some of those."

"Well, if the squire'll lend me the horse and wagon I'll go to-morrow and see what I can find, before the snow flies — it'll be down upon us as soon as the weather moderates. I suppose I can string up some boughs here," and he pointed around the walls. "And you can make some wreaths."

"Oh! that'll be splendid; you are very kind, uncle," answered Patience. "But don't go yet. Stop and dine with us."

"Yes, yes," urged her mother. "I'm going to try the new ham, and should like your opinion of it. And I've lots of news to tell you. There's the baby waking — you haven't seen her."

He concluded to remain. In fact he felt some curiosity to know more of the strangers, and wondered why so little had been said about them.

The baby was duly exhibited and admired; and its name "Mary," commented upon according to his experience in regard to that name; and Mrs. Alison repeated for him the story of her misfortunes.

Then came the account of Mr. Browning's

generosity and its supposed cause — told by Pashie while her mother was getting dinner ready. During that meal, which none enjoyed more than Uncle Mark, Mrs. Grey made enquiries about Ralph White, of whom she had never heard until that mention of him in Dan's letter.

"Good reason why you never heard of him," he said. "He's a black sheep. Nobody dares to mention his name to the squire. I don't blame him, though; his patience got worn out years ago. Ralph might have been as fine a man as the squire — he had a better education and more money. There's where the trouble began — the old squire's will. You see, Ralph, he always did look out for number one mighty sharp, got round the old gentleman, somehow; and when the will was read William was to have the homestead here at the Hill; that was all. 'Twas a terrible shame. The daughter — she's out West — she had something — I don't recollect just what — well, a tolerable good slice. But Ralph, he had more than both put together. And that wasn't law nor justice — stands to reason 'twasn't. The young squire

felt awful bad, but he wouldn't make any move against it."

"Where was Ralph then?" asked Mrs. Gray.

"Ralph? Oh! here—just out of college, and running a great rig. Everybody said he was a fast fellow. My sakes! didn't he drive! Lickety-split—slap-dash; a three-year-old colt wasn't a circumstance to him. And the way the money went was enough to scare you. Well, William, (the young squire, you know,) when he saw how things were going, and how folks talked, he gave Ralph a piece of his mind. But it wasn't the least bit of use. Only hoity-toity—worse and worse—down hill he went faster than ever. Sowing his wild oats, he called it—Ralph did. A pretty big crop, he's reaped—and bitter enough by this time, I guess, if the truth's known. You never saw anything like it—he wouldn't hear to a single word. The last I knew he went to California, And the squire has had to send him money time and again. Terrible sick there, once, he was; and I just asked the squire one day, more than a year ago that was, how Ralph was

getting along, and he flared up madder than a March hare. Says he, 'Don't you ever say Ralph to me again,' says he. And I wouldn't be the one to tell him he's in the Fairberg mines, and sick there too — not — not on any consideration — no money would tempt me. He'd be so *riled*. Ever seen the squire up — a — tree?"

Mrs. Gray had not.

"You wouldn't want to more than once, I reckon. He's a nice man as ever there was in the world, a gentleman, every inch of him. Kind, too. My! what won't he do to help anybody that's in trouble. But his temper! — it's just a tiger, and no mistake."

Mrs. Gray was thinking what she should do to stop Uncle Mark's garrulity when a rap was heard at the door. It was Mr. Browning. He called to know if his orders had been fulfilled, and was much gratified to see how pleasantly his gifts had been received.

Uncle Mark officiously introduced the Alisons and began to tell their history. He was in such a high state of excitement that Mrs. Gray kindly asked him to have an eye to Trip

and Tommy, and took up the narration herself giving a very brief account.

Mr. Browning was much moved, and offered to pay the board of the strangers until the woman found means to earn their support. But Mrs. Gray refused this. She would not tax his benevolence any farther. She desired the pleasure of providing for them herself. He laughed good-humoredly at what she chose to call her "whim," and then took his leave saying he should come again next week.

Uncle Mark soon followed.

"He must go ask the squire for the wagon. to get the evergreens. We shall have a laying of snow before morning, I reckon. I'd better get them in this afternoon if I can."

Thinking of the snow, as he went towards Pleasant Hill, recalled to him his conversation with Mr. Thornton the day previous.

"'The soul's health,'" he repeated to himself; "which — which — 'and all other things which a Christian ought to know for his soul's health.' I've got it straight, now. That's it. Those other things — that's the question. Did Phebe and I look out for the other things?

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Mrs. Grey does, that's certain, with Pashie. Yes, and with Dan too. Always has I guess. Poor Pashie! Dear little Pashie. Mark Weston, you old stupid! Poor *Mary! Our little Mary!* Phebe! Phebe! We didn't — those other things — we didn't — we didn't— "

The wart on his nose was very troublesome just now. His handkerchief was pulled quickly from his pocket and faithfully applied. How much longer that wart might have troubled him if the squire's carriage hadn't passed and the squire insisted on his riding, I am unable to say. But both nose and eyes were so red the squire thought the old man had been walking all the way from the next village — where he sometimes went for choice seeds — against the bleak wind.

"Yes; you are welcome to the horse and wagon," the squire said. "And while you are about it get enough for yourself. Mrs. White would like some too, no doubt. I hope to have a merry Christmas, and should like a few green boughs and wreaths in every room. You can have a horse now. Prince isn't just the thing — too frisky for going into

the woods. But Major — steady old Maj — after he's been rubbed down and had his oats can go as well as not."

Speaking of oats put a rash thought into Uncle Mark's head. But he kept it to himself; though it reached the tip of his tongue two or three times before they were fairly at Pleasant Hill. Mrs. White gave them a warm welcome. She was much pleased at the idea of ever-green decorations. "I shouldn't think it could be Christmas without them," she said; "and would much rather make my wreaths than buy them."

She asked about Mrs. Grey and Patience, and if they had heard from Dan this week. Then the rash thought found words — Uncle Mark told what he had supposed he could never tell the squire. But then it was not to the squire — it was to the squire's wife. And she, gentle, calm, quiet lady, if she had a temper kept it in good control; though she heard that Ralph White was nearer his old home than he had been for twelve years, in sickness and in poverty, dependent on the care and generosity of strangers.

CHAPTER V.

THE AMARANTHS ARE PLANTED.

JUST at nightfall came Uncle Mark to Mrs. Grey's with a large bundle. My blanket—for Dan," he said. "I couldn't sleep a wink to-night if I hadn't done what I could to make him warm. So you take it and fix it up with the mittens Pashie's been knitting, and I'll come early in the morning and get the expressman to carry it to him."

"Oh, the mittens are not finished," she replied. "It's no use to do anything about it to-night. Keep the blanket till they are ready. Truth to tell, I don't like to take it at all, Uncle Mark."

"No, no. Why not? I've fixed my old cloak first-rate. I never want a blanket again. You don't know how crank that cloak fits the coverlet. I'm a cute hand for contriving, you'd better believe."

"Well, just as you say. Let it remain, then; and we'll hurry up the mittens. Day after to-morrow, say, we'll have them done."

"Is it the mittens to be sent away to-morrow?" asked Mrs. Alison. "Oh, you may rest easy. I will finish them myself before I close my eyes for this night's sleep."

"This very night!" said Patience, wondering if she had heard aright.

"This very night, darling. It's but a trifle."

"Then we can send to-morrow," said Mrs. Grey.

"And Dan will get them for a Christmas present," rejoined Patience. "And then I shall have more time for our Christmas. Did you get the spruce, uncle, and the evergreen?"

"Well, some. There's none of it over bright. But I guess 'twill do. You see the frost makes them look sort of yellow. But

the trees are fresh and green. I chopped out some grand great boughs that'll look smart. It's at my shed. Next week I'll bring some in and see what we can do with it. I gave Mrs. White some — she wants to make some trimmings too."

"Did you? I'm very glad," said Mrs. Grey. "She likes all such things."

"Thank you, thank you very much," said Patience, at the same time, as he hurried off muttering something about the fire this cold night.

He had only fairly left the house when he popped in again with "Mrs. Grey, *those amaralds are planted.* I thought it all over down at the pasture this afternoon, picking the bear's-foot — like old-times. And — well — bygones are bygones. So the amaralds are planted. You know what I mean?"

A tearful smile in answer broke over Mrs. Grey's face.

"Well," he continued, "we'll have a new crop — bright as the best — if it's left for me to stir the soil, and water and weed them. You can tell John White just so when he

carries Pashie's posy;" and again the door was closed and he gone before any one could reply.

"Why, mother; what does he mean?" asked Patience. "Is he willing that Mary should come home?"

"That is his meaning, certainly," she replied.

"Then it's all coming round right. We shall all be so happy together. Nice—splendid! Don't you think so?"

"He has overcome his wilfulness and his pride much sooner than I expected. But it must have been a hard battle; and he has suffered a great deal in the contest. So we must be very gentle with him, and very discreet in managing Mary's return."

Mrs. Alison, intent on finishing the mittens, had not heeded a word that had been said. Knitting as speedily as possible, with her baby closely folded in her arms, she crooned a low lullaby while the needles flashed back and forth in their busy rounds. Patience watched her with great interest, and when the work was ended she could not refrain from a hearty

cheer, though at the risk of waking the baby and stirring up Trip to a barking accompaniment. Fortunately they were both too sound asleep to be disturbed; and the mother carried both her children to the cot prepared for them; for Tommy too had fallen asleep beside Trip.

Mrs. Grey had lighted a lamp and begun her sewing again. Mrs. Alison begged to assist. She gave her a small, simple portion to test her ability.

Mrs. Grey saw with pain that the flushed cheeks and hurried breath of the previous evening were now troubling Patience, and she bade her remain quiet — she must rest — she had been too much excited. She would not say a word to distress or alarm her, but hoped the doctor would be in to-morrow.

Mrs. White and her son John soon came in to see about the errand to Mary Weston. She was told of the change in Uncle Mark's feelings and of Mrs. Grey's plans for Christmas.

"I am delighted! the old man has been

very unreasonable," she said. "Mary was a lively, wide-awake sort of girl—fond of dress and excitement, and not happy except when in a bustle about something or other,—did not like the quiet life her parents led. That was all. There was nothing worse than that before she went away. And I have made particular inquiries since, and find there is no foundation for all the scandalous gossip that has worried her father so much."

"Hasn't she been on the stage?" asked Mrs. Grey. "I understood so from Uncle Mark."

"No! Oh, no! That was a false report, arising from some one seeing a dancing-girl who resembled her."

"But her father believes it?"

"Yes, and because just before she left, a company of travelling play-actors had given entertainments here in Greendale, which Mary enjoyed. It is true that she went from home intending to visit a relative, meaning at the same time to obtain employment in the city. But she was then a thoughtless child, though unusually capable for her age. She had been

petted and indulged by her parents till their small means were inadequate for her selfish wants. Indulgence and flattery had made her conceited; she was naturally wilful — inherited that from her father, I think, — and she felt equal, young as she was, to attempt almost anything."

"But her relatives in the city — they knew nothing of her for a long time," said Mrs. Grey.

"I know — I understand. She had a singular experience. Before reaching Boston, a lady in the same car felt attracted toward her because of her resemblance to a daughter who had recently died. She entered into conversation with her, gained her confidence, heard her plans, and prevailed upon her to make her a visit before going to her relatives. This lady was very wealthy. Mary was delighted with her, and went readily. There she has been ever since, taking the place of the daughter in that lady's love and care."

"And yet her father has been kept in ignorance of this!" exclaimed Mrs. Grey.

"Yes. She made herself so necessary to

the comfort of her benefactress that she, in her turn, connived at Mary's desire to keep the matter secret, fearing her parents would demand her return. The girl, you know, caring so much for self-gratification, and having been allowed in it all her days, considered her parents' ease and comfort of little account. Mrs. Sidney, that is the lady's name, wished to educate her in all the requirements of fashionable life, and Mary was an apt and willing pupil. She did not hear of her mother's death till two or three years after it occurred. At that time she had begun to see how undutiful she had been, and would gladly have gone home."

"If she only had! How much unhappiness and how many hard thoughts she would have saved."

"Yes, yes. But Mrs. Sidney would not hear a word of that — tried to convince her that her father had forgotten her. Still, she was very uneasy, and her regret increased until she heard that he was well, and living comfortably. I think, however, from what my city friends tell me, that she is tired of the

gay life she has led. She never goes into society now, except in the company of her benefactress; and spends most of her time in seeking out the poor and relieving their wants."

"I am glad to hear that. She has sent her father many little presents, proving her wish to look after his welfare. And she has written kindly, asking to be restored to favor—promising to do the best she can for him in future," observed Mrs. Grey.

"I've no doubt she's sincere. She has gained wisdom through experience," returned Mrs. White. "If he will only consent to her return, it would be the best thing for them both. But I suppose he distrusts what she writes. I think he has been too ready to believe the exaggerated accounts of gossiping neighbors."

"I am afraid he has. But his is a disposition that cannot easily forget ingratitude. Such indulgent, self-sacrificing parents as hers, would be almost heart-broken by desertion and indifference. And I do not wonder that after so many years, anger has given place to grief in his heart."

"It is something that he has so far relented as to allow her to come at Christmas; and you must be delighted to know that you have been the means of this."

"It was more Patience than myself."

"Not me! O no!" exclaimed Patience. "The amaranths — the amaranths! Didn't Mrs. Alison say there was a power of meaning in them?"

"Ah! indeed, indeed!" interposed Ellen; "and the tender spot in the old man's heart. The very thought of the blossoms touched that, and the truth of your good words, ma'am, spread their power. And then — then —" she lowered her tones, and looked very solemn, "the holy grace from above came down to his soul, and set wide open the doors of his heart, and all the cold and hate that he had held against the poor girl flew out, and away — like the snow-wreaths before the May-breezes."

"Well; you are right, my good woman," said Mrs. White. "Now let us take the flowers that will be so precious to Mary."

Mrs. Grey had hidden among the ama-

ranths a slip of paper, on which in a few kind words she made known her wish to see her at Christmas — how gladly she would be welcomed both by her father and herself. She wrapped the bouquet carefully, making a small package, which John promised to place in Mary's own hands.

Just as she was leaving, Mrs. White called Mrs. Grey aside, and in a whisper inquired who this new friend of hers was who talked so sensibly about Uncle Mark and Mary; and then asked what Dan had written about her husband's brother.

Mrs. Grey was amazed at the question. "How did you know?"

Mrs. White mentioned her informant's name.

"Uncle Mark! Why, he said he shouldn't dare speak of it to Mr. White."

"He did not — but to Mr. White's wife," was the laughing rejoinder. "Really, is Ralph very ill? William doesn't wish to see him — says he will not — but that he mustn't suffer. When you write to Dan please say we are ready to supply all Ralph's needs;"

and, with a good-night, Mrs. White and her son were gone.

"Ready to supply all Ralph's needs," said Mrs. Grey to herself as she resumed her sewing. "She's a nice lady, but poorer than I had any idea of before — for she is not ready to supply his needs. 'Tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.' Well, they may gain this yet — I hope so — she and her husband." A slight remark from Mrs. Alison recalled her attention to matters around her. "Come, Pinkie!" she exclaimed, "the sand-man's been round I see; your eyes show that. We'll close the day; for Dan's bundle is to be made ready early in the morning, and so we must all rise betimes."

Mrs. Alison was up before the others and had the mittens nicely washed and pressed. Patience wrote a short note, and this, with the mittens, was folded within the blanket. "Won't he be surprised? I should like to see him undo this bundle, shouldn't you, mother?" she said, as her mother wrote the directions on its wrapper.

Uncle Mark popped in hastily and seized the package, fearing he should be too late, though he had double the time needed for reaching the express-office.

"Stop a minute!" cried Mrs. Grey. "Don't be offended if he sends your blanket right back. He'll say you need it more than he does. I shan't be surprised to see it returned to-night."

"Then I'll throw it to the dogs," answered Uncle Mark surlily. "Yes, yes. Trip! Trip! you don't need it, but you shall have it, old fellow, if it does come back. I wish I'd told you to write so, Pashie. Hows'ever, perhaps he'll be glad of it. Dan's a sensible chap — he knows what's what any time of day."

Mrs. Alison, eager to get Tommy's frock done, accepted Pashie's offer to hold the baby. The little thing was easily amused; and Patience so fond of children that she did not mind the weariness that the frolics of the chubby hands and feet were bringing her. Her mother was the first to notice it, fearing her paleness would be followed by the

hectic of the past few days; and arranging pillows and a few playthings on the carpet, sat the baby there, with Tommy to look after her. But she could not refuse to let her sew a little when she said plaintively, "I can't keep my hands still while yours are so busy." So she was allowed to tuck the skirt of Tommy's frock.

"I have sometimes wished that I owned a sewing-machine, and if I had one, Ellen, we might get your things done in next to no time," said Mrs. Grey. "But it is all hurry, hurry — drive, drive — with a machine, and then nothing at all to do. I like to take work more moderately and more calmly. And I believe I am better off without one. Hand-sewing is nicer, and gives me some time for thought upon other and more important subjects — which a machine cannot do."

The doctor's chaise went rattling past. He seemed suddenly to recollect that he ought to call, for it returned immediately; and he threw the reins on the horse's back, jumped out hastily and came in, humming a merry air that he had once heard Patience sing.

The sick girl's cheeks had begun to glow, and her fingers moved a great deal too rapidly over the sewing. "This will never do," said the doctor, gently taking the work from her hands. "Come, I see you need fresh air. You shall ride with me. Get her cloak and hood, mother. We'll wrap her up warm. And then — where would you like to go, little girlie?"

Bewildered by this sudden fulfilment of a wish that she had hardly dared to harbor for a minute, Patience could not reply. He saw her embarrassment and answered himself — "Down town, of course. That's where all the little folks want to go now-a-days, to see what Santa Claus is providing for them."

She smiled, almost cried too, in her tremulous joy. Her mother took her in her lap, wrapped her sack, and then a great warm shawl around her, tied her hood snugly over her ears and neck, and drew on her mittens; while Mrs. Alison knelt down beside the stove and warmed her overshoes. These were soon on and she was ready, amid the staring astonishment of the baby and Tommy's inquis-

itive chatter — and Trip's bounding and barking delight.

"Why! you have made her quite a mummy," said the doctor, laughing at the great bundle she had become. "I wonder if you know where you are, Pinkie, or what you are, under all these wrappings? I guess you'd like a little more freedom."

"Never mind, mother knows best. I don't care for anything," she answered, "if I can only go out of doors. I guess I do look queer, though."

"An Indian pappoose, or an Egyptian mummy — that's what you are," and he laughed heartily as he took her in his arms and carried her to his chaise.

Her mother followed, to seat her carefully with cushions behind and around her, and to tuck the buffalo-robe snugly over her feet. "I wouldn't have her take cold, Dr. Thornton," said she, "on any account."

"Nor I either," he returned, gathering up the reins. "But a breath of this clear air is just what she has been pining for; and I mean she shall enjoy it," and he set off at a

careful pace, for he knew well that her back and shoulders could not bear rough motion.

Then he began to talk about Dan, and told ever so many stories about life in the mines, in such a funny way, she afterward said to her mother, that she didn't realize how far he was taking her. All at once he said, "I'll tell you more another time;" and there they were close by Krall's splendid store! "I am going to buy some pretty things for little friends of mine, and I want you to come in and help me choose," he added, greatly to her astonishment.

He took her in his arms, and spying an empty chair at the further end of the store, placed her in it. Then unloosed her wraps and took off her hood. "Now I'll leave you to look round and get rested; I've some business with the proprietor to be attended to first," said he.

Her eye ran rapidly over the premises—saw the long line of goods overhead, the boxes, and drawers, and cases around—heaped, and piled, and standing. Then she began to be more particular; and finally got

a very good idea of the place and what it held, and was very, very happy, though her back ached dreadfully.

"I guess we'll begin—you are rested enough to help me, I think," said the doctor. "Let me draw your chair to the counter, and you shall tell me what to buy for three boys. Look at these picture-books and these toys, and say what are best for them, they are five and six years old."

She turned over the books first and selected a bright-covered Red Riding Hood, a Robinson Crusoe, and a Dick Whittington. Then wanted to put with them a gorgeous Moses in the Bulrushes. But he told her he only needed three. So she laid the last back.

"Now the toys," said he, laughing at her reluctance with the Moses picture-book. "One boy has quite a musical taste, and one admires soldiers."

A small accordeon was her first choice. For the second she hesitated between a company of wooden soldiers and a drum. The doctor decided by taking the drum. "It can't be lost very easily," he said. Then

came an immense jumping-jack which they both admired.

"One thing more," said Dr. Thornton, giving the toys to an attendant; "something for a little girl — about your own age, Pashie."

"Oh! a doll, then. All girls like dolls," she answered. "A walking-doll, if you don't think it costs too much."

"I think she would prefer something more useful — she's an industrious little body. She sews very prettily too."

"How would you like this work-box?' asked the salesman.

It was a neat rose-wood box with mother-of-pearl ornaments on the lid. He opened it and Patience thought she had never seen anything so handsome. There was a beautiful looking-glass inside the lid. On a lovely blue velvet cushion lay a bright pair of scissors; then in different niches, a bodkin and a pencil-case. This was in a tray. The man raised the tray and then she saw thimble, needles, pins — indeed, *everything* she thought, that any one would ever want

to use in needle-work. "Oh! this is elegant!" she said, drawing a long breath and gazing in ecstasy. "But then, it costs too much. It must be worth a great deal of money."

"Well, what if it is, little Pinkie Prudence?" answered Dr. Thornton, playfully pinching her cheek. "I should like to know if I haven't a perfect right to spend my money as I please? I shall buy it if it takes every cent I have — just because you said it costs too much."

"O, indeed, indeed," said Patience, much confused; "I didn't mean any harm. I know you are rich enough to buy it. I was only thinking —"

"Thinking — what? I didn't ask you to think at all," he said smiling. "However, there's no harm done. Let's see if I can find change enough to pay for it all."

He drew out his pocket-book, then his wallet; finally turned every pocket inside out, "to get every stray cent," he said. "Well, I shall be clean shelled out, that's a fact. Never mind! Somebody'll tumble down and

break a bone, or get scalded, or catch a fever, or something or other, before night; so I shall get a little change to pay for my supper. I don't want any dinner."

"Why, doctor!" cried Patience. "I don't think your friend would like to have you give her such an elegant present if you must do so to pay for it."

"You don't know anything about it. I shall enjoy giving it all the more; and she will prize it all the higher, when she understands my motive. So don't worry yourself a minute longer. And now I've finished all I had to do here, we'll ride again."

He stowed his purchases in the chaise-box, and seeing Patience had readjusted her hood and sack, he fixed her outer wrappings, carried her out, and tucked the robes about her — as her mother did. Soon they were riding leisurely homeward.

"I think this has been exercise enough for one day," he said to Mrs. Grey, who stood at the door to receive them. "Next week we'll try it again. Meantime don't let her get fatigued — nor excited about anything.

Excitement is bad for her. I don't want to see such flushed cheeks again."

Mrs. Grey looked distressed. He understood her anxiety, and continued—"The flush is nothing serious now, though. Debility, only debility. She'll gain strength by getting into the air."

With great glee Patience related what had been said and done. Her mother had suspicions about the box, but kept her own counsel, only replying: "Probably he wishes to teach his friend what true generosity is. She certainly ought to value it highly when she knows it cost him the sacrifice of his dinner—if nothing more. Of course he didn't tell you all he relinquished for the sake of purchasing it. And, Pashie, you can learn from his benevolence and the pleasure he seemed to take in getting these gifts, how much delight self-denial for the benefit of others can bring.

John White was successful with his own business in the city. But on calling at Mary Weston's home found she was out—would not return till late in the evening. So, very

reluctantly, he was obliged to leave the city without seeing her; and his promise to place the amaranths in her own hands was not kept. He left them in charge of a servant who said she should have them immediately on her return.

When the passengers from the last city train went hurrying past, Patience sat at her window to watch for John, and then her mother ran to the door. They were both disappointed that he had not seen Mary. "But, then, of course it will make no difference," said Mrs. Grey. "She will get the amaranths, and will be so glad to see them she will examine the bouquet closely enough to find the note. I left the end peeping out. Didn't I Pashie? I certainly meant to."

"Just a tiny corner. I remember, mother, because I thought it hid one lovely flower. She will see that, certainly. But I do wish John had talked with her, and told her how much we want her to come."

CHAPTER VI.

DAN'S GIFT AND DAN'S TEST.

NOW there was joyful bustle in Mrs. Grey's cottage. In the first place Mrs. Alison, who had insisted on helping her benefactress with Ferguson's work, hurried the finishing of Tommy's frock; and it was so becoming to him that Uncle Mark said it was a pity he couldn't always be a girl, and stroked and smoothed his hair in girlish fashion every time he came into the house.

Then for the baby and herself she refitted the other garments Mrs. Grey had given. Thus they all presented a respectable appearance. Unexpectedly, another bundle of

work had been sent; and on this she even outstripped her new friend. "Now, then," she said, as she folded and laid away the last vest, "now it's yourself, ma'am. The new frock from the lad's money. And you deserve it, surely. And wouldn't it be great joy for me to make every stitch of it, because of your kind dealings with me and the children, poor dears!"

Patience added her plea to Ellen's, as they now generally called her. So Dan's greenback was exchanged for a nice alapaca pattern for Mrs. Grey's own wearing and a worsted plaid for her daughter — this last wholly unexpected by Patience. And Ellen's patient fingers fitted and made both, while the baby rolled in good-natured play with Tommy and Trip on the carpet, or slept sweetly in her little bed.

But out of Dan's donation Mrs. Grey contrived to save enough to provide a turkey for the Christmas dinner. At first she felt almost afraid to spend the money so. But when she reflected how much her son desired her comfort, and how much it would

add to the festivity of the occasion, she decided to buy it — even if its cost must afterward be made up by unusual prudence in household expenses.

The snow came — a cold, driving storm. It had been so long looked for that almost everybody was prepared for it and took it philosophically. The wind rattled the windows, and piled great drifts to darken them, and shrieked dolefully through the key-hole, and rumbled and thundered in the chimney — as if old December was making one job of all his various tasks, and found it hard work to keep King Winter on his throne.

But Mrs. Grey's little parlor was warm and bright and cheery as summer. Not a person there had a thought for all the out-of-door cold and confusion; all ideas were concentrated that day on the fitting of the new dresses and how Dan would like them.

The day after the snow-storm was clear and calm, though very cold. Uncle Mark, as early as he could get started, began to shovel paths for the neighbors. More than three hours he worked thus, and then, though

the rheumatism had given him "a crick in the back," as he expressed it, he came in briskly to consult Mrs. Grey about buying the turkey.

She commissioned him to undertake that important purchase, and he stepped off at a lively pace towards the market. In an hour he returned, bringing, according to Ellen's opinion, "The most elegant bird that ever grew! My lady at the Hall would be glad to give every fowl of the barn-yard for such a handsome creature. For all the world as fine as a peacock — barring the green and the gold," she said, stroking its wings.

And Uncle Mark didn't think her praise exaggeration, for he prided himself on his knowledge of poultry. He knew all the points of the best breed, and could tell to a month the age of any biped — plucked or unplucked. So, between them both, the Greys felt themselves extremely fortunate in possessing such a desirable candidate for the Christmas cheer. It was hung conspicuously in the pantry, beside Mr. Browning's ham, till the

important day for its disposal should arrive; receiving many a glance of satisfaction every time culinary operations called Mrs. Grey near the precincts of that tidy little apartment.

The days went on. Patience seemed no worse, though the hectic flush still troubled her. But, in joyful anticipation of the future, present illness was forgotten, except when some sudden movement, or a little over-exertion, renewed the old pain. Mrs. Grey was less anxious about her. She had called at the doctor's office and had a long talk with him; and though he admitted he had some fears that she might never fully recover; still, on the whole, he spoke favorably.

Dan Grey, greatly surprised by the arrival of the blanket and mittens at first had a mind to feel offended with Uncle Mark; but, on second thought, knowing the old man's sensitive nature, concluded to accept it thankfully. He had never regretted giving his blanket to Ralph White, who, still in bed, suffering acutely, often alluded to the comfort it afforded him. Yet, if quite contented with

his newspaper coverlet, he was glad to substitute something better — slept more soundly for it, if the truth must be told. The mittens were a perfect fit, and exactly what he had begun to think he should have to buy. "Just like mother and Pashie," he said to himself as he smoothed their wrists and looked at them admiringly. "That expense is saved, and I shall enjoy them a great deal more than store mittens." He wrote a letter that very night thanking them for their kindness, and a handsome note to Uncle Mark, saying playfully that he would have his revenge on him some time and he had better be prepared for it.

Mr. Browning made his promised call, nor did he come empty-handed. It was on the evening previous to Christmas Eve. Patience was singing merrily, and he tarried at the door to listen. Uncle Mark came along and they went in together. Mr. Browning made himself very entertaining. Uncle Mark, he noticed, was particularly pleasant — even his voice was less gruff than usual. He joked him a little about it; but desisted, when he found the old man relapsed into surliness

at these jokes. After kind inquiries about every member of the family he was told of Dan's gift to his mother and what use she had made of it. Thereupon he opened his basket, and, as if apologizing, said — "Nothing but a goose — there wasn't a turkey in town to-day, or I shouldn't have brought this," and laid a fine goose on the table.

Mrs. Grey was puzzled — knew not whether to decline or to accept the gift. For the moment, thought she ought not to have it, but feared he would be offended if she didn't take it. Patience saw her dilemma, and answered immediately, "Thank you — thank you, sir! Oh! now Dan can have a Christmas dinner — a real Christmas dinner. He shall have the turkey, shan't he, mother? Goose is plenty good enough for us."

How they all laughed at her enthusiasm! But she didn't mind it a bit — not she; for it had troubled her kind little heart greatly — the thought of enjoying in her comfortable home roast turkey provided by Dan's generosity, when the poor fellow, in his rude lodgings, most likely would have no change

from his usual plain fare; and the relief she had so unsuspectedly gained by Mr. Browning's benevolence, overcome every other feeling.

"If you think so," Mr. Browning said, the goose will taste better to you than turkey. Nevertheless, I wish it were a turkey."

Of course Pashie's mother agreed to her suggestions; for, tender mother that she was, Dan's hardships often recurred to mind, and she was glad of this turn in affairs. In order that he should receive it in good season it must be cooked early the next morning; and after Mr. Browning left she made arrangements to that effect, all other duties remaining in abeyance while she and Ellen prepared it for the oven.

About the same time that this disposal of the turkey was decided upon, Dan Grey, and two other lads, who worked in the same gang at the Plympton mine, were walking in to town. After their day's labor was ended most of the workmen congregated in one of the sheds built to receive the rough ore, and passed the evening in smoking and talking, or lolled in their bunks at the lodging-

houses. Such was not Dan's way. All his spare time was spent in reading, and he very often willingly walked the two miles in and out for the sake of the two hours he might spend at the free reading-room, or to procure a book from the free library, that could be taken to his lodgings to read when the weather was too stormy to go in town.

This evening he with these two others was trudging along the snowy road, in the clear moonlight, noticing each nice farm-house and ample barn — and they were not few — that wore such an air of thrift and comfort, and were so great a contrast to the rude shanties and rough sheds of the mining-grounds. Passing these they came to the business part of Fairberg by a wide, straight street. Old Lombardy poplars flanked this street on either side — like grim sentinels guarding the entrance — as if the sleepy old place were some great city of ancient story.

Before reaching the poplars their conversation had dropped from the farm-houses and the barns to their contents. Sam Eustace had made acquaintance with some of the farmers

and knew what crops they raised, and how much stock they owned and its probable value.

"There's no end to the barrels and bins of onions stowed away in Farmer Loring's cellar," he said. "And you ought to see the Jersey cows he's got — regular beauties, every one of 'em! And hens — such a flock! My! he can't count 'em, there's so many. Feeds 'em on clams, mostly — clams and corn. I was in his henyard last Sunday and he told me all about it — showed me all around. First-rate man he is too."

"Loring — Loring? Oh! the Frederic mine is in his pasture," rejoined Dan. "They say he is very rich."

"Sam! Sam! What do you say for a lark?" cried the other boy, till now silent. "You too, Dan? you must join us."

Agreed!" exclaimed Sam. "I'm sick of such a stupid life. I'm ready for fun anytime Frank."

"What is it?" asked Dan. "What do you mean to do?"

Frank, with a loud laugh, laid one hand

on a shoulder of each of the other boys, and drawing them as near as possible whispered something at which Dan shrank instantly, as if in horror; but Sam cried — "Good, good! We'll have a Christmas dinner by candle-light then. That stove in White's room has an oven. I'll be chief cook. We'll offer to sit up with him — he'll be glad to have us, his rheumatism's so bad."

"To-morrow night, then," said Frank; "eight o'clock sharp. Behind the barn. Bring your clothes-bag Sam. Tell marm Jones you're going to the laundry. Mum's the word."

"Dan, you'll help?" queried Sam. "Chicken'll go nice after fried liver and hash."

"No, said Dan, stoutly. "I'm not a thief."

"Who said you were?" retorted Frank. "We might as well have a couple, as the rats. That barn's full of rats."

"Oh! Dan isn't going to back out," said Sam. He's too clever for that. Come, hurry up. We shall want a cooking-pan, and I'm going in to Surry's and make sure of that before he shuts up."

But Dan, hasty enough usually in reaching the library, was in no mood for hurrying. His companions left him and ran on in advance. Just as he reached the library-door he saw the boys come from Surry's near by, and stealthily hide something under the low branches of a fir-tree that stood in the library-grounds. He knew instinctively what they had hidden.

With gleeful faces they followed him, touched his elbow and winked as they passed to the reading-room. He did not notice them — began eagerly to peruse a newspaper; but, perplexed and distressed, could not comprehend a word of its contents. He took a magazine, with no better result; they found great amusement in the caricatures of a pictorial sheet, which they were unwilling to lay aside when he was ready to go.

But there was something in his manner that induced them to leave, though with great reluctance. Sam rushed to the fir-tree, took thence a huge pan, and shouldered it, while Frank burst into a loud laugh. And both

became so uproarious that Dan felt ashamed to be in their company — had some fears of the police — and told them so. At this they became quiet, and, except an occasional jostle or scramble together, behaved quite orderly.

Before reaching their lodgings Dan made several attempts to dissuade them from the proposed "lark," as they styled it. With no effect — to make them more determined that he should join them. They even went so far as to threaten that if he would not join them they would do the mischief, and tell farmer Loring that *he* was the culprit.

"He won't suspect me, so friendly as I have been," said Sam. "And I shall stand up for Frank against all the world."

Dan passed a restless night, divided between scruples at their demands and fears at their threats. He had keen moral sensibilities, and high and correct principles; but his moral courage and strength were severely tested in this strait. While he was tossing on his pillow, trying to devise some plan of

escaping his tormentors, his mother, miles away, ere she composed herself to sleep gave him her last thoughts, smiling to herself at the pleasant surprise she had in store for him.

CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTMAS PREPARATIONS.

VERY early in the morning of the day before Christmas a column of smoke curling from Mrs. Grey's chimney proved that the inmates of her cottage were astir, and — wonderful to relate — a similar manifestation had taken place at Uncle Mark's, yet without pre-concerted arrangements. Mere accident revealed this last to Mrs. Grey, and she was just on the point of going in to see if the old man was sick when he presented himself at her back door.

She started in affright, and Ellen also, for in the dim and uncertain gloaming the dress

he had assumed gave him a weird and most uncanny appearance.

"Don't be scared, now, don't, Mrs. Grey," he said. "I want to make my old room look a little better than common. And so I'd like to borrow a grain or two of sand — not more than a spoonful — just to scour some bad places. Never noticed how smoky and dark it was till yesterday."

Before he had finished the sentence her alarm had changed to amusement — she could not forbear laughing at the comical apparition before her.

In recollection of his wife's tidy habits he had put on, to cover his own attire from the slop and soil which house-cleaning is supposed to occasion, the long, wide sack once worn by her in the performance of household duties. Over this a broad tow-cloth apron — also a relic of her industrious life — gave still greater volume to his burly form. And yet no Dutch vrow, who after some early spring freshet had been searching her bleaching-ground for lost linen, could have presented a more be-draggled aspect.

"Well. Laugh away, if it suits you. It don't harm me," he said in a hard, matter-of-fact manner. "You see I'm not used to it. Dear sakes, no! And so — well, these things *are* too moist for comfort. However, I'm most through now. Just a few minutes more, with a little of your sand, and my old room'll look as neat as a pink."

"You shall have the sand, Uncle. But you had better have called on us to help you."

"Bless your heart! I wouldn't think of such a thing. You've done too much already. Don't say a word about it. I meant to get all done before you had a hint of it — should if my sand hadn't given out."

Provided with the desired article he went back to his cleaning, and the two women, consulting together, decided that one should go to his assistance. So Ellen was left in charge of the turkey — baking in the stove-oven, while Mrs. Grey slipped on her washing-dress and ran in to Uncle Mark. He had a strange aversion to company at home — never asked any one to come in. During

an attack of rheumatism the previous winter, Mrs. White had ventured to call, with some delicacies that she supposed he could not prepare himself. But she was so ungraciously received, neither she nor anybody else had dared to cross his threshold since.

Mrs. Grey had often wondered how he managed his house-keeping; but her curiosity had never led her to do more than to enquire from time to time if she could do any cooking or washing for him; and these kind offices he had sometimes allowed her to perform in her own house and according to his particular directions. Now she found herself actually at the door, his usual desire for seclusion ignored, before she was aware of it. As she raised the latch she hesitated an instant — only an instant — then, with a lively step, passed in as unconcernedly as to any of the neighbors' houses.

It was not yet sunrise. The low-walled room, lighted only by one dim lamp — and that feeble radiance somewhat obscured, for Uncle Mark had arranged an iron pan to shelter it from a current of air entering a crack in

the rickety window near which he was vigorously scrubbing — looked dark and dismal enough. Casting a hurried glance around, Mrs. Grey strove to get a clear idea of her surroundings. But it was some minutes before she could distinguish definite forms in what seemed a chaos of gloom and disorder.

Evidently the old man was as yet unconscious of her entrance, so absorbed was he in his task, revealing, too, the energy he had brought to bear upon it by a succession of deep, guttural sounds somewhat between groans and growls. These noises and his grotesque appearance completely upset her gravity — she found it impossible to restrain her mirth — long and loud was the laugh in which she indulged.

He sprang to his feet, gave a clumsy bound, as if fright had suddenly deprived him of all control over his limbs, and fell — seated upon an old stool.

By this time he had found out who his visitor was, and her probable errand; so good-humoredly joined in her laughter. Taking advantage of his change of position she steered

her way carefully among the displaced furniture to the bucket and brush, and went on with his work.

"Now Mrs. Grey!" he began, on seeing her nimble fingers clutch resolutely at the brush, and rising quick to prevent the accomplishment of this purpose. "You do beat all — no mistake. But I can't have it. There's enough for you to do at home."

"No, no," she replied, with an air of authority. "This is woman's work, uncle. You needn't think to take it out of my hand. Just put things in their places, and I'll do the cleaning. Why, this is just what I like to do — scrubbing is my hobby. So get right out of my way;" and she gave the brush such a flourish that its contents fell in a copious shower over the bewildered man's face.

He was glad to retreat; without demur busied himself in "putting things to rights," as she suggested.

The scrubbing and the rinsing went on rapidly — Mrs. Grey found much more to do than Uncle Mark had given her reason to expect. But, by the time the sun began to

peep in at the cloudy window panes the cleaning was finished, except this very glass by which the sunlight entered, and which, according to all housewifely rule, ought to have been the first to enjoy the wholesome ablution bestowed upon the rest of the long-neglected room. As soon as she discovered this omission, she lost not a moment in getting fresh water and soap; which were plentifully applied, till, clear as crystal, the renovated panes added double lustre to the sunbeams that now danced with joy in and around the little apartment.

Uncle Mark, after much solicitation, had consented to remove his house-cleaning array — with the proviso of wearing a long towel girded about his waist — and now stood admiring the effect of these unwonted efforts.

"Well, it does take a woman's head, after all, to calculate!" he observed. "I took hold wrong end first — stupid old owl, that I am. Forgot all about the windows. It's lucky you came in, Mrs. Grey, I never knew before how much better the sun can shine through a clean window. Ain't it jolly, though?" and

his scowling face, expanding in a broad grin of satisfaction, lost half its wrinkles.

Mrs. Grey smiled, altered the position of a table, and then, giving directions for the better arrangement of his kitchen utensils, hastened home to prepare breakfast—followed to her door by Uncle Mark, voluble with his thanks. "Because it's all for Mary," he said, at last. "I mean to ask her in when she comes to see you, and I don't want her to think I can't live like other folks."

Patience, as much interested as any one in the cooking of the turkey, had risen early, and without assistance, the first time for months. She sat holding the baby while Mrs. Alison stood ready to pour the coffee, for breakfast was waiting the mistress of the little household. "All ready and waiting! Why, I didn't expect this," she said, hurrying to the kitchen to take a look at the turkey. Satisfied with its progress, she soon took her seat at the table. "You have done double duty in my absence Ellen," she remarked, as she glanced over the nice and neatly arranged food set before her. "I'm sure I'd

no thought of your attempting so much."

"Double duty?" she rejoined; "it's *double joy*. I've never yet done half my duty for all your kindness. The blessing of the morrow's feast to me, will be the toil of it. And I'd sing for gladness to spare your own feet and hands; and never be weary either, with life-long service, if I may."

After this declaration Mrs. Grey did not hesitate to call upon her for assistance in any of the unusual labors crowded into this and the following day. Mrs. White, also in need of help, sent tempting offers. But Ellen refused them — she would not desert her first and her best friend.

The turkey, well-done, cooled, and carefully packed, was expressed by the noon train. Dan would surely get it in the evening.

When Uncle Mark came after dinner with the spruce boughs and evergreens Mrs. Grey and Ellen were both ready to begin the trimmings. John and Alice and Edith White, who had spent all the morning decorating their mother's rooms, enjoyed the work so much that they came in to help. Patience

could not be content in the parlor, so Uncle Mark and Ellen carried her in her chair to a snug corner of the kitchen, where she could overlook them all.

The room presented a lively scene; Trip and Tommy frisking and tumbling about among the heaps of fragrant branches and leaves; the baby, fastened in a chair, crowing and cooing at the hilarity and confusion; the girls laughing and chatting; Patience talking as fast as either of them; and Uncle Mark and Ellen telling each other of this and that in the Christmas trimmings of their young days; Mrs. Grey speaking now to this one, and now to that, as they twisted and twined the ground-pine and the bear's-foot into wreaths and long garlands. As to John, he sat in silence, diligently obeyed all orders — picked, twined, braided, or fastened — and strove to hear all that was said and see all that was done.

In the midst of their gayety came in the doctor — a shrill, prolonged whistle drawing attention to his presence. Then with two long strides he crossed the evergreens, and

lifted Patience, chair and all, from her companions to the farther end of the room. "There, no nearer to-day," he said, good-naturedly. "This damp, cold work won't do for my patient. I'll forgive you, though, Mrs. Grey, if you'll wrap her up for a ride. Its capital sleighing, and I want her to help me in carrying around the presents we bought the other day. But you must get through all this dampness while we are gone, or she'll be down with a fever to-morrow."

A few minutes sufficed to get Patience ready, and they started, her face fairly radiant at the prospect of a sleigh-ride. She thought she had never heard such beautiful music as the tinkle of the horse's silvery bells; and never experienced such delight as in this swift, gliding movement along the smooth white road.

They went on merrily, often meeting gay parties in dashing little cutters, or in gorgeous vehicles, the horses proudly prancing, the bells jingling in gayest melody, and the company shouting and singing in glee.

"Oh how bright and beautiful everything

is!" she cried. "And how happy everybody is."

The doctor smiled — sadly, incredulously — as he answered: "We'll see. Come, I must stop here."

It was an ugly, dilapidated house — scarcely better than a shed. The doctor took her in his arms and entered. The room was low and dark. An old gray-haired woman came to meet them. Patience, shuddering at her untidy appearance, turned aside her face. Dr. Thornton bade the woman good-day, and advanced to the bed, whereon lay a sick child. "Ho Harry, my boy," he said, very gently, "I've brought you something pretty, and this nice little girl for your friend," at the same time seating Patience in a broken rocking-chair near the bed and helping her remove her wrappings. Then from his pocket he took one of the picture-books he had bought at Krall's.

The boy raised his slender bony hand to receive it, and whispered, as he tried to sit erect, "Thank you, oh, thank you."

And Patience saw that he was fearfully misshapened, his head twisted toward one shoulder,

and that he seemed to draw his breath with great difficulty.

The doctor arranged the pillows, and placed the child more comfortably, who, coloring with pleasure, was eagerly turning over the gaudy leaves of the book. Then he asked the old woman some questions, which she answered coarsely and sullenly. Turning again to the boy, he said in quick, merry tones — "Hillo, Harry! so you like the pictures?"

A smile flitting over the pinched, sunken features was his reply.

"Something more yet. You'll have a merry Christmas, after all; won't you, my boy?" and somewhere from under the folds of his riding-cloak he drew the accordeon. Harry was too delighted to speak. Again he smiled his thanks.

"And you won't cry and worry if granny does scold and fret, when you can have such nice music? —" putting the small instrument into the claw-like hands, that trembled with happiness, and covering them with his own steady fingers, bringing thence a few plaintive strains followed by more joyful sounds.

The boy pressed and hugged the toy in rapturous delight.

Setting the pillows again, and tenderly smoothing the bed-quilt over the poor, crooked limbs, which Patience had not seen, the doctor then gave attention to her, whom he soon carried out. And they rode on to distribute the rest of the gifts.

Both the other boys were ill, and miserably poor; perhaps not quite so wretched as Harry, yet so miserable, that, as they came from the last, Dr. Thornton said, "Is everybody happy, Pashie? Is everything bright and beautiful for Christmas?"

There were tears in Pashie's eyes. She could only shake her head sadly.

"Ah! my child, there are many more than these. When you think how many there are much, very much, more miserable than you are, you won't grieve because you can't run about like Alice and Edith?"

There was another shake of the head and a resolute smile around her lips as she met his kind, earnest look.

After that, they rode on rapidly in silence—

nearing home, she thought. Yes, it was just at her mother's door that he stopped his horse, saying, "There's a little girl lives here that I think knows how to make people happy, and my last and best gift is for her;" and from under the sleigh-robes he took a package and carried it in with him. It was the work-box that Patience had thought so beautiful. The quick tears came again to her eyes, this time with joy. She tried to speak, but there was such a big lump in her throat, and such a ringing and rushing in her ears, she never knew whether her thanks were uttered or not.

The kitchen door was open. He saw that the room was now dry and quiet, and all traces of evergreen had been removed. "That's, right!" he ejaculated "just as it should be," and turned to the parlor.

"Grand! grand enough for the governor," he said, running his eyes over the wreaths and other trimmings, as he placed Patience in her chair and laid the package on her little stand. "But you must keep the temperature up to seventy, Mrs. Grey. These spruce-

boughs and green vines chill the air so you will have to draw heavily on your coal-bin to-day and to-morrow — because of our little girlie here;" and with a pat on Pashie's shoulder he darted off, pretending not to see her tearful though beaming face.

As soon as she could speak Patience called her mother's attention to her present.

"O how good and kind people are to us, mother!" she said. "But then it is God, after all, isn't it? He makes them think of it."

"Yes, darling; God is indeed very good to us. And we'll try to show our thankfulness by being generous and kind to all around us," she answered.

Much time was spent in admiring the box, and I must not forget to say that the first thing that met their eyes on raising the lid was the very same green and blue Moses in the Bulrushes that Patience had fancied when selecting the picture-books. This she felt sure was intended for Tommy, and, greatly to his delight, it was soon in his possession.

Now nothing remained to be done but to

dress themselves and get through with supper in time to receive the expected stranger. They felt confident that Mary Weston would not wait till morning to begin her Christmas visit. Ellen insisted that the new dresses must be worn to grace the occasion. All possible speed was made. Tommy, and the baby also, as if determined to see the matter through, forgot to be sleepy, and seemed as much alert as if it were morning instead of evening.

As soon as the lamp was lighted Uncle Mark's smiling face beneath his Sunday hat peered in at a front window, and the next moment his whole burly presence — in best overcoat and boots polished as for church-going — appeared in the midst of the happy group in Mrs. Grey's parlor, who sat listening to the chimes floating out on the frosty air from the belfry of the old church.

"It seems as if the bells must know what's going on, and sing their very best on Christmas Eve," he remarked. "And to-night they're gayer than ever. Seems, too, as if I were a boy again. Oh my! I suppose you'll laugh, Mrs. Grey, but I feel just like dancing to their

music — just as spry as a cricket. I couldn't sit still at home, anyway — not even to smoke."

Mrs. Grey did laugh at his liveliness, and asked if he wanted to crawl away out of sight, as he said the other day he always did at Christmas.

"Oh! don't you believe it," he returned, gaily. "Things have altered since then. Well I guess other folks feel young and gay, too. Those new gowns are terrible becoming, I think; don't you Ellen?"

Mrs. Alison agreed with him.

"And Pashie is looking most well, I do declare. Come, child, can't we have a Christmas tune, as well as the bells?"

Patience needed no urging. Her heart was full of music. She said gleefully — "O yes; I've a new song. This is the way it goes." And she sang in her most jubilant voice this carol:

"Once on the darkness of midnight
  Rose a most beautiful star,
Lighting the way of the Magi
  Seeking Messiah afar.

Beautiful star! Beautiful star!
Bethlehem's beautiful star.

"Angels, on white wings gliding
Sang through the radiant sky—
'Peace and good-will unto mortals
Glory to God on high!'
Glory to God! Glory to God!
Glory to God on high!"

"Now, with a splendor eternal,
The rays of that beautiful star
Bring to both lofty and lowly
Blessing and peace from afar.
Beautiful star! Beautiful star,
Bring us thy peace from afar.

"And the glad voices of angels
Sing their sweet anthem again
Where brotherly love continues
In palace or cot its reign:
Peace and good-will! Peace and good-will
Peace and good-will among men!"

"That sounds something like the bells, Pinkie. But I couldn't catch the tune. Give us something else—one of the old hymns, now," said he, talking rapidly, "I must sing or my heart will burst."

"'While shepherds watched'—old St. Martin's," said Mrs. Grey. "It's a grand tune."

"That's it, yes," he rejoined.

So Patience began, and he and her mother both dropped into the melody.

His tones were harsh, and at times discordant. But it was heartfelt praise, prompted by sincere joy and thankfulness; and as such ascended to the throne above as surely as if it had been uttered in notes of the most faultless harmony. Other hymns, favorites of his early manhood, seemed haunting his mind to-night, and a curious medley of scraps from both sacred and secular songs followed. Then the singing drifted into conversation.

Thus the evening wore on. Now and then the sound of footsteps in the street or the wind rattling a loose blind, made them all turn their eyes toward the door, and to listen attentively, in expectation of a rap. Once Mrs. Grey was positive she heard some one at the threshold, and skipped merrily to open the door—only on vacancy. The children grew tired. Their mother bade them kiss Uncle Mark good-night: and holding the baby, cross

and crying, on one arm, with her disengaged hand she dragged reluctant Tommy from the room. After that they all sat some time in silence.

Then, as if struck by sudden thought, Mrs. Grey hastily replenished the fire. "It is a cold night, she said, and Mary shall have a warm welcome."

Uncle Mark drew a heavy sigh.

"Perhaps she can't come till to-morrow," said Patience.

"I do believe that's it," said her mother. "Well, that will be all right. However, there's another train yet."

Uncle Mark said nothing, but smoothed down his Sunday vest, and thrust his long fingers nervously through his few gray locks till they stood around his head like a halo, and with a limping gait went to the window. He peered anxiously into the darkness. "It isn't so fair as 'twas," he observed, sententiously. "The wind has got out north-east. I knew it half an hour ago — felt it in my bones. There'll be a tough storm to-morrow, I think. She ought to come to-night." And,

shaking his head dolefully, he took his pipe from his vest-pocket.

Mrs. Grey noticed how his hands trembled, as he lighted his pipe and resumed his seat. He smoked a few minutes, then went again to the window.

"Cars are in! There's the engine! and the bell! Don't you hear them?" cried Patience, joyfully. "Now she'll be here in a few minutes."

"Leave the shade up, uncle," said her mother, "we'll have a light at the window." So she placed Pashie's little stand, with the lamp, near the pane, Uncle Mark still gazing abstractedly into the street.

"Hark! I hear wheels," said Patience. "Johnson's hack. I guess. Oh! mother, go to the door, please—" the girl's cheeks were crimson with excitement.

The door was open. But the hack passed on without stopping. Foot-passengers in small groups, some talking and laughing merrily, came hurrying along. Mrs. Grey threw a shawl over her shoulders, and went out, gazing nervously into the darkness. The lamp

was still at the window; Uncle Mark also, eagerly watching, and scanning every female figure, till the last one had passed — even till he saw conductor Crane with his lantern turn the corner of the street. "Just as I thought," growled the old man, as with an angry jerk he brought down the window shade — to the great danger of the lamp.

"Why, uncle!" exclaimed Patience, bursting into tears.

Mrs. Grey at the same instant entered the room, saw the trouble, and, without a word, moved the stand and quickly replaced the shade; while Uncle Mark noisily opened the stove and lighted his pipe again, and then paced the floor with hasty, irregular steps.

"How bright the evergreens are by lamplight!" said Mrs. Grey, by way of diverting his thoughts. "I don't know when our little room has looked so pretty."

"What's the good?" he growled. "I wish they were all in the pasture where they grew."

Patience sobbed audibly.

"Don't, don't, darling," said her mother,

in a voice of agony. "It will not do to distress yourself so."

Ellen, re-entering, looked from one to another in alarm. Then taking Patience in her arms, she sat and rocked her, singing cheerfully part of an old ballad —

"Away with all sighing and crying,
We're under the Christmas holly!
With hope are the merry hours flying,
We're under the Christmas holly!
No doubt, nor distrust — the pale, weasen-faced collie
Shall bide with us, hide with us under the holly."

"Suppose you mean me," muttered the irascible old man, seating himself clumsily in the arm-chair that Mrs. Grey had placed for him near the stove. "Hasn't there been enough to make me mistrust? Those fine letters didn't mean anything; it stands to reason they didn't. And it's turned out just as I expected — just as all my plans do."

"Take my word, uncle," interposed Mrs. Grey "take my word, and wait a little longer."

"'Twould be no use," was the dogged reponse.

Uncle Mark's battle, according to Mrs.

Grey's ideas, wasn't finished yet. But she couldn't let him give up the conflict.

"Something important must have occurred to prevent her coming to-night, you may depend. She'll be here to-morrow, I think. We'll all retire early, have a good night's rest, and be the brighter to welcome her."

He shook his head incredulously.

"This is our feast of charity," she continued. "Let us try to remember that, and in word and deed exercise all that we can of that charity that 'thinketh no evil, hopeth all things, endureth all things.'"

"It cuts across the grain, neighbor, sharply. I suppose you're right, though; you are 'most always, he answered, rising. "I ought to curb my spirit. Well, I guess I'll go home," he added, taking down his overcoat and hat.

Mrs. Grey helped him with the coat and kindly buttoned it for him. With an awkward "Thank ye," he brushed his sleeve across his eyes, and then said, "good-night."

"More than that!" shouted Patience now restored to cheerfulness. "A merry Christmas! — to you and to all of us."

CHHPTER VIII.

DAN'S CHRISTMAS PARTY.

AFTER his night of unrest Dan Grey rose early, still oppressed by the dreadful secret. Fearing the threats of his comrades, he avoided all his fellow-workmen, went betimes to breakfast — which he dispatched hastily, alone — and was the first to go to work. He could scarcely stop, and had not the heart to say the usual cheering words for which Ralph White left his door ajar every morning; causing the sick man many painful surmises as to this sudden change of manner. He was so dejected and dull during the day that several of the men enquired if he too was going to be laid on the shelf."

Frank Willets and Sam Eustace — the two boys who had planned the mischief for the coming evening — made themselves noisily merry, provoking reprimands from the superintendent of the gang and many cross ejaculations from their companions for their noise and carelessness. They made no attempt to speak with Dan till working-hours were over, then they took forcibly — dragged, rather than lead, him by the arms to an empty shed. A few of the men going to supper saw them thus, thought it was some boyish joke, and wondered at Dan's quiet resistance.

The last thing that Dan saw as he entered the shed was the full moon, emerging from the wide blue sweep of ocean that lined the horizon, and the path of light that she threw across the white capped waves straight towards him. Swiftly came a thought of his father, with the idea that he might one day return — as his mother had always told him. Thoughts of her succeeded this — of her and his little sister Patience, and of his dear pleasant home. Then the time occurred to him. Could it be Christmas Eve, and he

here, and in such a condition? But he was allowed scarcely a minute for thinking — only while his tomentors rested to recover breath. Dan was strong and in capturing him they had put forth great exertions.

Soon they began their persecutions. Finding that threats would not conquer his scruples they resorted to blows. His temper was now thoroughly roused. He attempted to parry, but ended in returning the blows.

They were experts in this business.

And he?

He at last succumbed — bitterly and in desperation. Despising himself thoroughly for so doing.

Then all three went to supper, with the expectation of starting on the expedition immediately afterward.

It is needless to say that Dan scarcely tasted of the food set before him. As he left the supper-room his eyes fell on a box bearing his name, that had been placed on a side-table.

"Came by express this afternoon," said the housekeeper, in answer to his enquiring glance.

He took the box to his chamber and with a chisel and hammer quickly removed the lid.

A cry of joy escaped him as he saw the contents. Some one in the room below thought it was a shriek of pain, and immediately five or six — Frank and Sam foremost, of course — rushed up to know what was the matter.

Dan's candle gave but a feeble light, yet enough to disclose the cause of his cry. It was curious to see the change that took place in Frank and Sam as they looked on the box and what it held — so Dan said long afterward.

Frank was the first to speak. "Hi!" he exclaimed, "you're in luck, Grey. Christmas enough for a week, I should think."

"No — no," answered Dan, smiling. "Leave me for the present, all of you — friends," he continued, looking around on the grimy faces — so gnome-like and eerie in the dimness.

"Come again, all of you," he added, "at eight o'clock, sharp," with a keen yet good natured glance at Frank and Sam.

"So you give up, do you?" said Sam, who, with Frank, made way for the others to pass out.

"I do," said Dan firmly.

"We don't," returned Frank. "Remember the consequences," and he pulled Sam by the sleeve, who would fain have lingered longer — casting back towards Dan a most malignant leer.

But Dan did not — would not heed it. The burden he had carried all day was gone. And he felt as if he sat in his mother's presence — with this box and its contents, which she had so kindly prepared for him. "There was never such a turkey before," he thought, as he turned it over, saw how plump it was and what a rich brown it had taken in baking. "And what a delicious odor it sent into the room!"

"Chicken-stealing? No, not if every miner were in league with Frank and Sam. He cared not for their threats of revenge now. Let them do their worst. He would brave all. Even the *charge* of theft if it must come; — that couldn't harm, not really, not as the *crime* would."

Looking around his room he congratulated himself on having paid extra price and secured the whole chamber, and a bed too. He and Ralph White were better situated than the other boarders in these respects. And he had never thought of having a Christmas party, either. "Yes, it was very fortunate now," he said to himself.

He moved out his bed, to make free passage around it. This was to serve as table. He had a number of old newspapers; spread smoothly they would answer for a table-cloth; though I am sorry to say (but the truth must be told) the very identical paper that had been used as a blanket had the head of the be — *table*. It couldn't be helped. There were not enough newspapers without that one.

This settled he ran down stairs and begged the loan of dishes and knives and forks. Then a piece of brown paper was spread over his trunk, making of that quite a neat stand. Down-stairs again for a pitcher of water and tumblers to place on the stand. A nice loaf of white bread and a pat of butter were in

the box with the turkey; these he sat with the water.

Once more over the stairs — for candles, half a dozen, these, put in empty beer-bottles — borrowed of an inveterate bibber next door — placed on the shelf and in the windows.

Now came the carving. It was a noble bird, and the ease with which Dan dissected it proved that Uncle Mark's boast was not a vain one. Off came wings and legs at a single thrust of the carver; and as he sliced the tender, juicy meat Dan's eyes glistened with anticipation — the very sight of it was appetizing to one who had fared as he had during the past two months, and the fragrance from the marjoram and thyme in the stuffing he inhaled with delight — it smelt "just like Christmas at home."

A generous portion was laid on every plate; then he hurried down-stairs once more, with a plateful to the housekeeper, who was voluble of thanks. Up again; and with another plate filled with tid-bits, such as he thought an invalid might relish, he slipped into Ralph White's room. His feast was now all ready

for his guests, and quite properly, if not with so much order and nicety as he would have liked.

The sick man had wondered over the unusual bustle. Dan gave him a lively description of what had been going on, and staid chatting till he heard the company assembling. For his own room, with only the heat of two hours' sunshine, was not particularly warm at night. "It would be much more comfortable when filled with guests; and the candles would no doubt throw out considerable warmth," he said, in reply to White's regrets that he must celebrate Christmas in a cold room.

The men came trooping in, a round dozen of them, for the news had spread rapidly and Dan was such a favorite with the miners a great many wished to congratulate him on receiving this fine Christmas present. Had no intention of begging an invitation to share in it? Not at all likely — oh, no! Of course not! Doubtless, they were afterwards greatly astonished to find themselves eating with as much *gout* as the few who were the first to see the present!

To Dan's great surprise, Frank and Sam, looking rather sheepish, to be sure, stood at the entrance as he returned from White's room. They had scrubbed their faces clean, brushed their hair, and dressed themselves as carefully as if they were going to the city. Dan extended both hands and grasped theirs heartily. "Glad to see you!" he cried, "I'm right down glad to see you, boys. Hurry in with the others." He knew they must have abandoned their mischievous project, or they wouldn't be here now — and dressed in their best. His spirits, high enough before, rose several degrees.

He greeted all the company merrily, and did his duties as host in such a generous, impartial manner that when each guest had been twice helped not one would take another morsel. Though they had eaten a hearty supper of baked beans and brown-bread scarcely two hours before, they devoured with avidity all that was given them; and no wonder — not one of them had even so much as laid eyes on roast turkey for over a year. But they did have the manners to

remember that possibly Dan would like to know for himself how it tasted, and at last refused whatever he offered. He seemed to have forgotten that he had anything to do but entertain his guests; and between serving them made no end of jolly speeches, and kept them laughing at these, or at the funny stories he had to tell about Christmas doings, till Sam Eustace begged him to stop talking and begin to eat.

"Not a bit," replied Dan. "I've had my fill in seeing how you all enjoy it."

"Just this small smudgeon," expostulated Sam, cleaving a dainty bit from one wing.

"Not a shred — not a speck — not a single sniption," returned Dan. "Nothing to-night. Couldn't do it if 'twas to save life. The fragments will give me a feast for to-morrow."

They let him have his way, and so jolly did they all become that Frank and Sam got over the shame they at first felt at receiving such kindness from one whom they had so badly treated, and they too joined in the merriment, laughing as loudly as any of

them. Frank even attempted a few wretched puns that set the whole company in a roar. One and another continued the sport, with conundrums, till more than the evening was spent. Dan began to think it would be midnight before they left.

But the candles gave their signal of departure. Three of them actually expired, spending their last breath in a splutter of remonstrance at keeping such late hours.

And yet not a man started. Would they stay all night?

It was Christmas Eve, and they, all far away from kindred and dear ones, were particularly susceptible to kindness. Dan's unexpected generosity had set the tide of friendliness flowing, and here, in the cheery atmosphere of this simple Christmas feast, the rough and rude miners had been drawn nearer to each other than ever before. No one wished to stay that tide, to be the first to close this unwonted enjoyment. At last Dan began to collect the dishes. Then they soon left, with shouts of Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Sam and Frank waited, offering to assist in clearing up the room. After the last man had passed out Sam said in a deep strong whisper — "Grey, I feel as mean as a mud-turtle. But I tell you what it is, old fellow, you're a brick — solid, square, clean through! I'll stand by *you*, through thick and thin, you'd better believe."

"Hold up, Sam!" cried Frank. "I've got something to let on." He was struggling with a pile of refractory plates that he hoped to get down-stairs without a smash-up. It was almost a miracle that in his excited state both he and the plates reached the kitchen with no bones broken — except the turkey's drumsticks, that he threw into the coal-hod with all the force of his one hundred-fifty lifting power accellerated by the speed of his eager, throbbing heart.

Back again, in less than a minute, he came, climbing three or four stairs at a stride. He pulled his handkerchief from his breast-pocket with a great flourish. Then wiped his brow, the exertion of taking down the plates or the perturbed state of his mind — perhaps

both — had bedewed his face with moisture.

"I say!" he exclaimed. "I couldn't get it out before; but I say, Dan! this is tip-top — this turkey-supper. It — it finishes me. I'm done brown on hen-roosts. Do you hear? Your turkey's used me up for that business — root and branch."

"Here's my hand on that," answered Dan, with a firm grip of Frank's knotty paw, as Sam called it.

"No more chickens for me, either," said Sam. "Give us a rest on that question. But," he added a few minutes later, as he folded the last newspaper from the bed, "Dan old fellow you're sound on the goose — chickens, I mean?"

"Sound?" said Dan. "Wild horses shan't — *No*! — bring on your quartz-crushers! Fifty horse power — Corliss engines, and all!"

And sound he was, through and through, as both the lads found; for the trio were almost inseparable from that time forward, as long as they worked in the mines. And when Dan left, the friendship deepened and strengthened — absence only proving its sincerity.

It was long before Mrs. Grey and Patience knew of the good that resulted from the thoughtfulness of Dan's comfort and pleasure at Christmas. How much good resulted from Dan's forbearance and generosity at that time can never be told — can never be estimated.

CHAPTER IX.

"SHE ISN'T THERE."

THE Christmas sun rose clear and bright, streamed merrily in at the window of Uncle Mark's sleeping-room, one ray dancing over the wart upon his nose in such glee as to rouse him from a very pleasant dream in which his daughter had figured conspicuously. It was past his usual time of rising. His disappointment had kept thought busy till a late hour, and then came rheumatism with its fiercest twinges to make him wakeful till toward morning. But as he afterwards confessed to Mrs. Grey, he had something worse than rheumatism to contend with, and he couldn't go to sleep till he had conquered it.

"Well, Christmas is here," he soliloquized. "And I'm ready for it, I do believe, this time." He rose, still ruminating upon his dream, and hastily prepared for the day's duties, talking in a low monotone: "I do wish I knew. If it should come true now, 'twould be a happy day — no mistake. Let me see — the train will be in at nine o'clock. I guess I'll look out for that."

Breakfast over, he stepped for a moment into the little apartment which he still called Mary's room. It remained almost exactly as she left it so long ago. For her mother, with nearly superstitious care, had guarded its simple furniture and few homely ornaments as if they were the sacred relics of the dead; always telling the few privileged friends, whom she occasionally allowed to take a peep at it, that she knew Mary would come home some time or other, and the child should not see change there if the rest of the old cottage went to ruin.

It had been no small consolation in her daughter's absence to make a weekly visit to this room, at other times closely locked, and

spend some hours in dusting and airing the furniture and in looking at the books and pictures which it had been such a delight for herself and the girl's father to provide only one short year before she left them. She and her husband also, were so used to poverty that the pretty carpet and bright-colored lithographs that they had striven so hard to obtain for its adorning, appeared in their eyes little less than the magnificence of a palace. And when at death, she enjoined upon him to continue the scrupulous care she had given the room, he took the trust readily; and had performed its duties so well that in making it ready for Mary's occupancy again he had very little to do besides the regular weekly dusting, before his great attempt at cleanliness in the kitchen.

One glance around the apartment assured him that it was ready for Mary's return. He closed its door as securely as usual, and with an air of expectancy drew his chair near the window. But he did not seat himself. Bringing his overcoat and hat from their accustomed place in a small recess of the kitchen, he placed

them on the table close at hand. Then from its hook over the mantel-piece took down the great bull's-eye watch, once his grandfather's, to see how much time he had to spare before going to the station to meet her.

He had made up his mind that she would arrive on the nine o'clock train. He need not start for a quarter of an hour. Filling and lighting his pipe he began to smoke. He jumped up almost instantly however, and looked around for a newspaper that he had been too busy to read during the last three days. That found he ran his eye over two columns, folded it hurriedly, threw it on the table and his pipe after it. Nervously putting on his hat, he thrust his arms into the sleeves of his coat; buttoning this as he went — having fastened the rickety door of his cottage — he passed with a quick, firm tread down the street.

His neighbor, Mr. Thornton, was advancing in an opposite direction. He was greatly surprised at the improvement in Uncle Mark's appearance. No doubt the Sunday clothes and hat which he had happened never to see

before — had something to do with this. But the inspiration of an excellent purpose illumined the rough features, and a hopeful smile had smoothed away many harsh lines from the old man's face, while the consciousness of a worthy endeavor seemed to straighten the hitherto drooping shoulders and give decision and sprightliness to his gait.

"Well, neighbor!" exclaimed Mr. Thornton extending his hand. "You'll have a green Christmas, if I may judge, though the snow has come as you hoped it would. And I wish you a merry one with all my heart."

There was a twinkle in Uncle Mark's eyes; he took Mr. Thornton's meaning immediately. He grasped the extended hand, but said nothing. His face was purpling, and he contracted his bushy eyebrows, hoping to hide the emotion that would make itself visible, in spite of all his efforts.

"Yes, old friend," continued Mr. Thornton, "I am truly glad. But the thaw came first, didn't it?"

"Bless your heart! I suppose so," answered Uncle Mark, finding his voice. "And — well,

I thought it all out — what you said about the cold and health."

"The soul's health?"

"Yes. Phebe and I didn't consider, didn't think enough about those other things."

"Other things?" Mr. Thornton looked puzzled.

"O yes; on account of the soul's health, you know. Well, maybe, — sometimes I think, then, again, I don't know. But it isn't unlikely after all — Phebe, she — she's found out, before now. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, yes, my friend," responded Mr. Thornton, tenderly. "Doubtless it is all clear and plain to her now. By us

'How weakly understood,
The great commanded good.'"

"But it's all coming out right, just as Phebe said it would if I'd be patient. To-day, too, I expect."

"I'm afraid I don't understand you. What is coming out as your good wife said?"

"Why, don't you know? Between Mary and me. She's coming home again. For good

and all, too, I calculate. It wasn't all her fault either; for we didn't teach her those other things. And I never thought about 'em till lately."

"Ah? That's as it should be," observed Mr. Thornton. "I heard Mary was expected to spend Christmas with Mrs. Grey. I was not aware she was to remain permanently."

"She may if she's a mind to," interposed Uncle Mark.

"It will be for good to both of you — this return — and for all, all the days of your life, I trust."

"Thank ye, thank ye, sir," replied Uncle Mark, with a jerk of his hat meant for a bow.

"I'm going to the depot to meet her. Do you suppose she'll know me? It's such a long while since."

"Know you?" hastily interrupted Mr. Thornton. "She'll recognize you quicker than you will her, I'm afraid. But I mustn't detain you; the cars are due by this time."

It was fortunate that Uncle Mark's uneasiness had started him so soon, for this meeting with his neighbor and his conversation cheered

and encouraged him greatly. But he had barely time to reach the station before the train came in.

He watched narrowly every passenger that alighted. There were only a few, and persons whom he well knew, mostly; all men except three, a young woman and two little girls.

No. She had not arrived. Mary was not here.

The engineer seemed in a hurry, rang his bell for moving on before the last child had stepped to the platform; so the poor little thing fell, striking her head violently on the hard planks, and set up a roar of fright and pain, while the train dashed furiously along upon its way.

Uncle Mark rushed forward, but he could be of no assistance. The woman, opening a package of sweetmeats, soon quieted the child; and in a moment all three ran joyfully toward a farmer's team standing near. The baggage master, rattling his bunch of checks, walked off. The expressman humming a lively glee, and then bursting into a song that echoed among the rafters overhead, hurried by, it

was a leisure day for him and he was happy. Save these the station was deserted.

The brightness of Uncle Mark's face was fast yielding to the old hard, disconsolate expression. He looked about him once more, as if hoping she whom he had expected in some unaccountable manner had escaped his notice. In vain.

His disappointment was intense. A great wave of bitterness rolled over his soul. His buoyancy was gone. Weak and decrepit once more, pulling his hat over his eyes, as if it had been his old slouched cap, with a dismal groan he turned from the place, scarcely knowing or caring whither he went.

After a few minutes he found himself on the way leading to the cemetery. A pleasant road enough was this in the summer, with its drooping barberry bushes and overhanging locust-trees vocal with the music of veeries and bobolinks, its borders of wayside nettles illumined with the glancing wings of innumerable yellow thistle-birds. But now, dreary indeed. The bare-limbed locusts moaned in the breeze. A flock of half-starved sparrows brawled over the

few dried berries hanging to the tips of the bushes just visible above the snowdrifts; while a couple of crows — the very embodiment of Melancholy and his mate Despair — left their nest among the withered leaves of an oak-tree in an adjacent field. Flapping their great black wings, and cawing most lugubriously, they came towards him in their flight; and, finally, took position as advance-guard a few yards in front of him, fluttering and pacing alternately as they heard his approaching footsteps.

This road was seldom travelled by foot-passengers during the winter; and the path, only slightly worn by the few vehicles which had passed that way since the snow fell, he found very difficult for his unsteady steps. Still he had managed to nearly reach the entrance of the cemetery, and could see how the green hillocks of summer lay snugly folded in the white coverlet of the snow, each sentinel headstone keeping faithful watch over the sleeper below, before he realized the absurdity of his situation. He gave a hasty glance toward a slate-stone nestling under the protecting boughs of a hemlock in a distant lot, and striking his

hands together — with so much vehemence as to startle his vanguard of crows into a dastardly flight westward — began retracing his steps, muttering as he went:

"You old stupid. She isn't there — not Christmas day — of course not. Where are all the angels and saints to-day if they ain't with Him, singing their best glories and amens and hallelujahs? That's so, Of course. Likely as not she hasn't thought one minute about old Mark Weston.

"Well you ain't worth thinking of, and you know it — miserable old owl, that you are. Wish I might just ask her a few words, though. Phebe — Phebe! The best woman that ever was. But our little Mary. We didn't — we didn't! If Phebe knows, can't she, I wonder, now? Ah-h-h! It's past me — I guess I'll have to ask Mrs. Grey. You never did have any head-piece, old Mark.

"I'm holding on to it, though — won't give it up — but I don't know but my brain will burst trying to keep it — that verse, 'thinketh no evil, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' Perhaps she's sick — fever, or diphtheria — and

can't — never can come. She's such a delicate creature, she can't stand it. My little Mary. *Our little Mary*, Phebe. A–h–h!"

The wind was too harsh for his eyes, or the wart on his nose was very troublesome, thought an old friend, who, in his already well-filled team, just then turned the corner of a cross street. For Uncle Mark had drawn his red bandanna into sight and was rubbing his face vigorously.

"Halloo! Mark Weston! What brings you in these parts to-day?" the man cried, in clear, ringing tones, that seemed the glad echoes of a hundred merry Christmas greetings, as he stopped his old gray nag.

Uncle Mark started nervously and hurried his handkerchief into his pocket.

It was the same team that he saw at the railroad station, and comfortably covered with the buffaloes sat the woman and two little girls, all smiling a recognition, in the most cordial manner.

"Josh Lancaster!" ejaculated Uncle Mark. "Well, I never! Who'd have thought of seeing you?" and he drew near the clumsy vehicle.

"You haven't forgotten me, then? It's like old times to hear you call me Josh.'"

"I suppose I ought to say Mr. or Squire — seeing as you're up at General Court this winter. But you ain't there to-day?"

"No. Holidays till after New Years. Well, how does the world use you now-a-days, Mark?"

A shake of the head and a compression of the lips was the only answer.

"Come, come. You musn't be blue to-day." Then as if remembering Mark Weston's loneliness Mr. Lancaster said very kindly — "Jump in — jump right in, Mark, and come help us eat our Christmas turkey. This is my daughter Mrs. Norton, and her two children, coming for the same purpose."

Uncle Mark remembered Mrs. Norton as a girl, and had heard of the sad death of her husband at Fortress Monroe.

She immediately spoke of their being at the railroad station, and his kind offer of assistance, coupling her remarks with the wish that he would accept her father's invitation.

"I wish I could," he said; "but Mrs. Grey

expects me. It won't do to disappoint her."

"Now I can arrange, it to suit all round. You come and take lunch with us, and then I or Seth — that's my man — will bring you back in time to dine with Mrs. Grey," suggested Mr. Lancaster. "That's easy enough."

So, nothing loth, though there was something — half-sigh half-growl — accompanied his assent, he clambered to the vacant place on the front seat — which by her mother's directions the elder girl had just left.

"It will do us both good to talk over old times, I'm sure," continued Mr. Lancaster, arranging a buffalo-robe — rather the worse for wear, indeed but capable of doing much good service for all that — sungly about his friend's feet. And away they sped, four good miles in twenty minutes bringing them to a capacious farm-house, at whose open door stood a buxom woman of middle age ready to shout a Christmas welcome.

When Uncle Mark found himself seated at a table loaded with all sorts of Christmas dainties; and this fine looking woman urging him to partake; and his friend "Josh," as he

persisted in calling him — though occasionally apologizing, and substituting Mr. Lancaster — piling his plate with mince-pie, cranberry-pie, squash-pie and Christmas plum-cake, he could scarcely persuade himself that it was not all a dream. But when his eye fell on Mrs. Norton and her children, the memory of his disappointment returned, and he realized in all its poignancy the pain still lurking in his heart.

He had little opportunity to indulge these feelings, for Mr. Lancaster plied him with questions concerning old friends and neighbors, alternating them with commendations of his wife's cookery; and though Mr. Lancaster, in a manner, frequently answered his own queries, he had a hard but a pleasant task to bear his part in conversation with both host and hostess and at the time do justice to the viands set before him. For a few moments he gave up entirely, as Mrs. Lancaster brought foward a bowl of hot chocolate — "Just to top off with," she said, with her most persuasive smile. The nectar of the gods could not have been more cheering or more inspiring. Before he had

finished it a rosy glow spread over his face, and with all the confidence of youthful friendship, in reply to her kind enquiries he gradually disclosed the blotched and tangled web of his married life.

"If we haven't eaten salt between us, all these nice things amount to the same," he said, going into details; till at last he told of this morning's disappointment, and how, in a half-crazed state, in his wish to tell Phebe his troubles, he had wandered toward her grave.

"There's a mistake somewhere," said Mrs. Lancaster, after assuring him of her sympathy, and that his confidence was not misplaced; "your daughter would have come if possible, I feel persuaded. Something of importance has prevented, you may depend."

"Don't get down-hearted, Mark," added her husband. "It is a long spell you've had of dubious weather, but you'll get into the sunshine yet. If you don't see her back here before it's time for me to go to the city again, when I do go I'll look the matter up."

Mrs. Norton said facetiously that possibly

as one of the Committee on Ways and Means he could consider the case under his jurisdiction.

"None of your nonsense, sis. I shall find time to befriend an old schoolmate besides attending to my state duties," replied our representative; whose pride in his newly-acquired honors had been the subject of many a harmless joke between them.

Upon this Uncle Mark bethought himself that it was time to be on his way home, or rather on his way to Mrs. Grey's.

Seth brought round the sleigh. All the family assisted in making their departing guest comfortable for his ride, and with reiterated wishes for a happy Christmas and New Year from the elders, and "Come again, come again soon," from the children, ringing in his ears, he fell into a pleasant reverie. He was in no mood for talking, only vouchsafed a half audible "H'm?" to Seth's occasional remarks about the weather and the roads. So the reverie lasted till he reached Mrs. Grey's. Then he was in a very cheerful mood — actually shouted "Merry Christmas!" with a smiling face, as he entered.

Mrs. Grey and Ellen had been quite anxious about him. They had expected him early, and as he did not come Ellen went to his door. Finding it locked, they concluded he had gone to the station to meet Mary.

"To church, I think," said Patience, as the morning wore on, and neither he nor Mary made their appearance.

"Possibly," returned her mother, though she doubted it — he so seldom went there — and made herself ready against service-time.

The children were happy with Trip and their playthings, but the rest of the family between expectancy and anxiety passed a very sober morning. Mrs. Grey went to church, saying she hoped she should bring both Uncle Mark and his daughter home with her — she should look around for them. She had returned alone, and though she spoke cheerfully of the friends she had met there was a tone of sadness in her voice. And tears filled her eyes at Pashie's eager "Was she there? Was she, mother — Mary, I mean."

"No, darling; nor Uncle Mark, either," came the reluctant words.

But before Patience had time to lose the look of hopeful appeal that shone in her uplifted face, or to utter the dismay that trembled on her lips, Uncle Mark's joyful shout was heard, and he stood before them, ruddy as a boy from his long ride in the bracing air, and nearly as brisk in his movements.

So exhilarated was he by his intercourse with the Lancasters that, forgetful of all else he began an immediate recital of his ride and visit, Mrs. Grey smiling serenely the while. Patience, bewildered by this unusual jollity, gazed wildly first at him, then at her mother, as if uncertain how to feel about it; Mrs. Alison listened with open-mouthed wonder; Tommy, tugging at the old man's coat and keeping up a running accompaniment to his talk with a loud chatter of childish jargon. And Tommy came off conqueror in this contest of tongues.

Uncle Mark changed his tones. With an assumption of harshness which he did not feel, he growled — "So I have got to let up, have I — for you, you young rascal; or have this old coat torn to flinders? Well, well,

it's always my luck," and off came the coat.

The baby, fluttering her little arms and cooing with delight at the noise, added her share to the general commotion, as she sat patiently among pillows near Pashie's chair. And — wonder of wonders — as Mrs. Grey took Uncle Mark's hat and coat, he chirruped gaily to the child, raised her in his arms, and for an instant fondled and tossed her playfully, amid Tommy's exultant shouts! "Wish I hadn't the rheumatism. The crick in my back goes against baby-tending, Mrs. Grey, so you'll have to hold this little one," he said suddenly.

But the baby was not so easily set aside. The dimpled chin quivered, and the blue eyes had such a grieved expression as he essayed to place her in Mrs. Grey's arms he did not give her up.

"O my! Bless her heart! She wants to stay with the old stupid! And those eyes — Mary's I do declare! Yes; and she's Mary all over; she shall stay." But dinner was ready and her mother took her.

It was a happy group that surrounded Mrs.

Grey's table, though the thought of Dan away, perhaps sad and lonely, perhaps hard at work also, would flit through his mother's mind; and Ellen, poor Mrs. Alison, musing on the changes that had befallen herself since the last Christmas, scarcely tasted of the good things her skilful hands had prepared.

Uncle Mark was loud in his praises of the goose. "It eats as well as turkey," he asserted — owing to the cooking. You're an uncommon good hand at a roast, Mrs. Alison. It's better than any I ever tasted at the squires."

Tommy and the baby were well-supplied, and Trip had his share in an old plate on the kitchen hearth.

Then came the pudding. It was pronounced a perfect success by Mrs. Grey herself, so Ellen who could not be so selfish as to mar their pleasure by any show of grief, and in return for their commendations merrily offered to teach Uncle Mark all he wished of cookery. Gradually getting an appetite while she talked, she finally dispatched as much as any of them.

But it will not do to say anything more of this Christmas dinner, except that Uncle Mark

cleaned the breast-bone of the goose for Pashie's special edification, and attempted to show her that from the dark and light spots upon it she might prophesy of the weather through the winter. "But there, now," he said, after a deal of talk about its significance, "I've forgotten just how it is. Can't you tell, Mrs. Grey? Are the dark spots for storms and the light ones fair weather? Or the light spots snow and the dark ones rain? I do wish I could recollect."

Mrs. Grey acknowledged her entire ignorance of the whole matter.

"You don't know, then, really, which end stands for the fore part of winter, and which for the latter end?"

Mrs. Grey was sorry to be obliged to answer that in the negative also. And Ellen was appealed to — with no better success.

"Well, Pinkie, then I must give it up — it's a kind of a riddle to us, you see. I've got a bright thought, though."

He drew a string from his pocket. "Now," said he," we'll have it up over the clock." He soon had it in place. "There," he sighed, with

a broad smile of satisfaction, as he resumed his chair. "It looks pretty up there. And you can watch the weather and set it down; then, when you come to have another goose-bone you'll know just how to read the spots. But I do wish I could recollect which is which, I declare for it."

With a wheezing cracked voice, beating time with his clenched fists on the arms of his chair he sang:

> "Old Gaffer is wrinkled, old Gaffer is grey,
> And his mind is fast going, I'm told;
> He gave the dogs mush, and he fed the pigs hay,
> And left the kye out in the cold."

By this time the children were uproarious with glee.

Mrs. Grey had fears that this gayety of Uncle Mark's was assumed. But she couldn't say a word to sadden him; so refrained from alluding to Mary's absence. Ellen divined her thoughts intuitively, and encouraged and helped on his playfulness by allowing her little ones uncommon familiarities with him, all which he bore with great good-nature. But he soon wea-

ried of Tommy's boisterous mirth. And, "The rheumatism don't approve of children," he said, at last, resigning the riotous baby to her mother's arms.

Ere long Mrs. White and her daughters came in. The girls were on their way to the Christmas tree. They had a few trifles for Patience, were eager to know what she had received, and to tell of their own gifts. Their mother came to meet the expected stranger. One glance at Mrs. Grey was enough to convince her that surprise at Mary's absence was not to be expressed.

Alice and Edith soon drew Uncle Mark into conversation over the presents, and found much amusement in his queer comments upon the pretty things. Tommy, somewhat abashed by their presence, kept himself in the background behind the wood-box — nearly hidden by Trip, whose snug quarters he had invaded, spoiling his after-dinner nap, and setting the usually gentle creature into a fit of snaps and snarls.

Ellen on the entrance of company had gone with the baby to the kitchen.

"Pashie's got another present," said Uncle

Mark, with a merry twinkle in his keen eyes.

"Another!" exclaimed both Edith and Alice, with lifted eyebrows.

Patience laughed her little low laugh — then louder, like the carol of a bird — and clapped her hands with delight.

"Show it — show it to us, do," came the impatient request, as the girls looked alternately at her and at him.

"Couldn't expect an old man to skip round like young folks," he said, limping slowly toward the door leading to the kitchen.

Patience did not utter a word, but kept up her delighted little laugh, while her visitors impatiently turned over and over again the presents they had already examined.

As soon as Uncle Mark had left the room, Mrs. White said in a low voice, with a look of disappointment:

"She hasn't come."

"No," said Mrs. Grey, in the same low tone.

"What can it mean? She must be sick."

"Perhaps she felt that I had no right to interfere — I am a stranger to her, and —'

"Your invitation was not interference," said Mrs. White, hastily.

"John certainly left my message?"

"Yes," and gave the bouquet. No doubt she received both."

The entrance of Uncle Mark with the baby in his arms put a stop to the conversation.

"Oh! the darling! the darling! Yes, you told us the other day!" cried both girls, each struggling to take her first. But Edith, being the younger, was obliged to yield.

They could not praise the little thing enough, who allowed herself to be tossed and kissed and hugged within an inch of her life. Uncle Mark sat near, and chuckled with suppressed merriment at their frolic.

Under cover of their sport, Mrs. White resumed her talk, and Mrs. Grey told her of the Lancasters and what Mr. Lancaster had offered to do.

"He's the very man for the business," said Mrs. White, "and I'll get my husband to tell him all the circumstances. They take the same train to go in town, I've heard him say, and he often sees him."

"But I hope there'll be no occasion for that," rejoined Mrs. Grey. "Sometimes I think she has an engagement that prevents her coming just now, and after a few days she will be here."

"In that case she would have written."

Nothing more was said. Mrs. White told the girls it was time to go to the Tree, and sent them off; and the baby went again to its mother; but she, herself, hoping to have a few words with Uncle Mark remained. She could not understand this very uncommon gaiety of his. The reverse ought to be the case, she thought. Or was he, after all, even more selfish than he had been considered, and indifferent — perhaps he had really lost all love for his daughter — and did not care whether she came or not.

Mrs. Grey said she could not sit idle any longer and rose to get her work-basket. But Patience wanted to see how she would look sitting still.

"Look? She looks good enough to have her picture taken," said Uncle Mark; "in

that new gown, and her eyes sparkling so happy-like. Don't she, Mrs. White?"

Mrs. White answered with an affirmative gesture.

"And she ought to for Dan, I think," he continued.

"She shall, she shall," said Mrs. White, resolution manifest in both voice and mien.

No sooner said than done. Not a word of refusal would either of the party take.

Ellen laid the baby on the bed, and ran for Mrs. Grey's bonnet and cloak. These her nimble fingers put on and fastened, and Uncle Mark playfully pushed the reluctant victim from the door, amid Mrs. White's lively sallies and the joyful laughter of Patience; Trip indulging himself in a series of his loudest barks, and the children's voices not at all backward in the chorus.

They were well on their way before Mrs. Grey fully realized what all this bustle was about. Mrs. White had drawn her arm within hers, and they were pacing along as briskly as two school-girls, when Mrs. Grey asked in trepidation where they were going.

"To the best photographer we have — Jones," replied Mrs. White.

Her companion endeavored to expostulate.

"It's all my own affair," was the response. "I'll attend to the whole business. I think it is a pity if I can't have my own way in this — good neighbor as I have been to you."

There was a tone of mock deprecation in these last words.

So Mrs. Grey resigned herself to her fate. Fortunately they found the artist at leisure. She sat immediately with good success. And Mrs. White triumphantly marched her home again, took off her cloak and bonnet, and seated her in the rocking-chair. "For Pinkie to look at as much as she pleases now," she said. Then roguishly forbidding Mrs. Grey and Ellen to leave the house before she came again, she hastily left.

It was getting dark, and Ellen made preparations for tea. Uncle Mark needed no urging to stop through the evening. After tea Trip and the children romped together, while Patience, for Ellen's special benefit, displayed again her presents. The work-box, for perhaps

the twentieth time, was emptied and its contents carefully replaced, Ellen telling her the use of its implements, and promising to show her how to work with the ivory bodkin and tatting shuttle.

Mrs. Grey and Uncle Mark conversed about the Lancasters and the Nortons. After considerable talk Mrs. Grey found that in her girlhood she had known Mr. Norton's mother and sisters, with whom his widow and children now had a home. Not a word was said about Mary.

So the early hours of the evening slipped away till it was time for Pashie's evening hymn, to which the others listened attentively, each heart silently responding to its blessed words.

"Now sing about our heavenly Friend," said Uncle Mark.

Patience complied.

His voice joined tremulously in the words —

> "And only wish to do and be
> Whatever seemeth good to Thee."

There was great stillness after the hymn was ended — even the children uttered no sound.

The silence was getting oppressive. Uncle Mark rose. "I believe I'd better go," he said. "Pashie, you're tired. It's been a hard day for you," and he laid his trembling hand caressingly on her wavy brown hair.

"No, no, uncle. Stay longer. Do stay. We ought to sit up later Christmas night to make the day as long as we can, I think."

"There is no ought about it, child. And I shan't stay another minute. All of us have had a tough day of it. You have certainly, Mrs. Grey."

"On the whole it has been a pleasant day, hasn't it?" she returned.

"Yes, yes. Anyhow, it has, after all. I've had to go round some pretty sharp corners; but haven't been upset — not once; so I shouldn't complain." He passed his hand across his eyes and cleared his throat.

She looked up for an instant, a little perplexed, but when she met the twinkle in his eye she saw the tears that he had not wholly dashed away and his meaning was clear.

Ellen helped him with his overcoat. He buttoned it slowly; then stooped, picked up

the baby, kissed her tenderly, and set her down again without saying a word. Drawing his hat over his shaggy eyebrows with one hand, the other he extended to Mrs. Grey. Ellen immediately offered hers. He grasped both heartily, and said in a low voice — "I'm keeping tight hold of it, that verse, you know — 'thinketh no evil, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' Perhaps she'll never come" — his voice was getting hurried and husky. "But the amaralds are planted; and God knows how to set them a-growing."

"Yes," rejoined Mrs. Grey. "We'll leave it all with Him, uncle."

She watched his uncertain steps as he passed from the door, and Ellen held a lamp at the window till they heard him enter his dark and lonely home. Both continued their watch till a light appeared within and they could see his clumsy figure moving around in the dimness there.

He soon made up a fire and sat down to take a comfortable warming; after that, he arranged matters for early morning duties, took a good

long look at Mary's room, and then went to his own.

If on this Christmas night Mark Weston lay awake till a late hour, contending with that evil which he considered "worse than rheumatism," as on the previous night, there has been no earthly note of it. But, judging by his mien and speech from that day forward the recording angel when he closed his book not only dropped a tear on the page that bore the old man's name and blotted out all his short-comings, but from his ascending wings must have showered the dews of the peace of God upon his troubled brow.

CHAPTER X.

MR. LANCASTER'S SEARCH.

MRS. White's playful command that neither Ellen nor Mrs. Grey should leave the house till she came in, was obeyed. Two days elapsed; then she came, bringing the photographs. In explanation of her restriction she said she had feared Mrs. Grey's ideas of independence would deprive her of the pleasure of making her this Christmas present.

Mrs. Grey could do no less than to accept them with grateful politeness. Patience claimed one, because of her suggestion. And Mrs. White said she was entitled to it.

All in good time had they been taken, for the following day a letter came from Dan,

filled with gratitude for his mother's remembrance and the box she had sent him. "And now," he went on to say, "you have been so kind, mother dear, I have boldness enough to ask for one more favor; and that is your picture. I know your scruples about sitting for a likeness, but if you will only lay them aside this once I will do anything you wish — I do so long to look upon your dear face once more." She was glad that she had a nice photograph all ready to go by the next mail.

After Christmas Uncle Mark went on with his usual occupations. There was not much for him to do at the squire's, to be sure, while the snow lay so deep. But, one way and another, he kept himself busy most of the time, preparing for spring-work. When he did have a leisure hour he spent it at Mrs. Grey's. Her little family had also returned to their quiet routine.

Mrs. Alison was getting well-used to Yankee ways, and nothing pleased her better than to talk with Uncle Mark of the contrast between country life in old and New England. And

Uncle Mark, recalling his remarks when he first met her and her children, failed not to say often that Mrs. Grey's "risk," had turned out "uncommon likely." She was very industrious—both in house-work and sewing, aiding Mrs. Grey not a little in the support of her enlarged household.

Nothing definite had been heard from Mary Weston.

Before the Christmas holidays were over Mr. Lancester had met Mr. White and gathered some information in regard to her life in the city. He also went to Uncle Mark's cottage. But he being out, at Mr. White's suggestion he called on Mrs. Grey. There he saw him and obtained farther particulars.

Agreeable to his promise he very soon made his way to No. 25 C — street where for the last eleven years she had lived. The name on the door-plate was not Sidney, and the servant who answered his ring gave him an insolent look when he enquired for Miss Weston, and said that he knew no such person. Farther questioning only elicited the fact of the former resident's sudden death, a few

days before Christmas, a distribution of her property, and a lease of the house to strangers. At this unlooked-for rebuff Mr. Lancaster's plans in regard to Mary received a destructive blow.

Now, where could she be?

Not at her Aunt Hannah's, for she had been more severe than the girl's father in her denunciations.

He was utterly confounded — had not the least idea where to look for her. But having made up his mind to restore her to her father, a project began to evolve in his brain, while he descended the marble steps, perplexed as he was, and before many days he favored it sufficiently to set it afloat.

He had heard of her many charities. He determined to make himself acquainted with the location of the most poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Every minute that he could spare from his duties at the State House was spent in hunting up those places and threading their dark and dirty alleys. Not a very dignified occupation, or recreation rather, for a representative. And I am afraid that if any of

his constituents had happened to meet him in those precincts, or had seen him enter there, even, his prospects for re-election would have been small, for M. District prides itself upon the dignity and high character of its representatives.

He remembered her as a child — slight in figure, with a bright face and winning smile; and graceful, but rather shy, in mien. He had been told that she retained these characteristics with the added completeness of womanhood, and, expecting to meet her in these purlieus, supposed he should have little or no difficulty in recognizing her.

Day after day he continued his walks, untiringly, telling no one of his quest; for he felt delicate about divulging anything concerning the secret sorrows of his old friend Mark. Even through weeks his patience lasted. The suspicions of the police were awakened, his steps followed, his movements watched. Yet of this, in his innocence and earnestness, he was entirely unaware.

Once, just before sunset, on a very cold day, he saw a person turning the corner of one of

the most dreary streets. He thought she resembled the Mary Weston of his fancy, and hurried to overtake her, unmindful of a street-car advancing in an opposite direction. The next instant he was lying senseless upon the snowy ground, his head within an inch of the front wheels of the car. A policeman who, as usual, had been dogging him, sprang to his rescue. Though bespattered with mud, and his clothing torn and disordered, a bystander recognized the features of the representative from M., and he was taken to his lodgings and a physician summoned. He had received no serious injury; in a few days resumed his seat in the House.

This was the last of his perambulations in that part of the city. In the hours of reflection that his illness brought, he became convinced of the futility of such a search, and, though with great reluctance, he wrote to Uncle Mark advising him to wait courageously God's own good time.

The remainder of the winter passed with nothing of importance to mark its progress, except the continued improvement in Uncle

Mark's appearance. The neighbors all noticed that from the occupations of Christmas day, or its associations, he had regained his lost manhood. There was a briskness in his step, his old crooked cane was no longer needed; a brightness in his glance, in great contrast to his former moping surliness; a cordiality and cheeriness in his voice and manner, that made him as agreeable as in his youthful days. Even children saw the change in him, and in place of mischievous pranks, which some had delighted to play upon him, came kindly services — like helping him shovel the snow from his doorway, or drawing his sled when the roads were icy.

And if occasionally some rollicking urchin, after performing one of these kind deeds pelted his old bear-skin cap with snow-balls, the old man, with a chuckling laugh, would bid him, "Fire away! Knock the figure-head to flinders!" which always proved a quietus to such sport.

As the winter wore on, Patience, instead of gaining, as Mrs. Grey tried to flatter herself, was fast losing strength. This Ellen attributed

to the noise and restlessness of the children and proposed finding a home elsewhere.

To this Patience made strong objection.

"Was it not *her* baby that God had sent as a Christmas gift? She must not take it away; nor Tommy either — he wasn't much trouble. Hadn't God provided all and more than they wanted for food and firing? If Tommy's frock was 'most worn out, and the baby's too — what of that? There were enough more. If not — why! she'd write to Dan — to send money — and he would, just as he did at Christmas. Or Mr. Browning would be in soon, and he'd see what was wanted, and send again, perhaps."

So Ellen said no more about leaving, did her best to restrain Tommy, and to keep the baby quiet.

Dr. Thornton, not finding the practice he had expected, returned to the city soon after Christmas. Old Dr. Mullins was now in attendance upon Pashie. The poor child missed the gentle, sympathetic ways of Dr. Thornton, but it could not be that alone that had caused an increase of her disease.

Uncle Mark plied the old doctor with ques-

tions. He only answered, "Time will show — spring weather will be the test." And then loving her as dearly as her own father would have done, Uncle Mark would make extra exertions to amuse her; and, afterward hurry home to spend the rest of the day sighing and moaning to himself.

Mr. White once spoke of visiting the Fairberg mines, but for some unexplained cause gave up the intention. Letters from Dan Grey told of the partial recovery of Ralph, who had no wants which his fellow-workmen could not supply; all of whom were glad to show the sick man kindness. Uncle Mark sometimes spoke of these letters to Mrs. White, but he had not courage to mention them to her husband. She often expressed great concern about Ralph, said that she pitied him, and if it rested with her he would be at the Hill in a week."

Mr. Lancaster's search for Mary Weston having been unsuccessful, Mrs. White, in several ingenious ways — which none but a woman, and she an adept in *finesse*, would ever have thought of — prosecuted discovery on her own account; for which her frequent shopping ex-

peditions gave her opportunity. In this way she explored the city thoroughly, as she supposed. But she too failed in the quest. Mary's benefactress was dead, and she, herself, had suddenly disappeared from society. That was all she could learn.

CHAPTER XI.

"HEADSTRONG, THAT'S THE WORD."

WHEN John White left the amaranths and Mrs. Grey's invitation, the servant took them in good faith, intending on Mary Weston's return — she was absent on an errand of charity — to deliver both. Miss Weston was detained down town till a late hour. When she came home she found that Mrs. Sidney had been taken suddenly ill, and the housekeeper had called the family physician. He pronounced the attack apoplexy, from which she could not recover. She lived scarcely an hour after Mary's return.

There was great excitement among the servants. In the confusion and dismay Mrs.

Grey's message was forgotten and the bouquet thrown among a quantity of Christmas trimmings that had been ordered.

Mary herself was greatly shocked at the accounts given of Mrs. Sidney's illness. For the last three months she had at times complained of headache and vertigo; but did not consider herself too unwell to keep up her usual round of gayety. At the moment of her attack she had commenced dressing for an evening party.

A cold tremor ran through Mary Weston's frame as she entered the chamber of the sick lady. The sensation and the scene that caused it she never forgot. Years afterward, if anything recalled the consternation of that evening it was accompanied by a thrill of horror.

A glare of gaslight filled the room. The physician and the housekeeper stood near a low couch, on which reclined the stricken sufferer, struggling for breath. A richly-embroidered wrapper, loosened from its fastenings, hung negligently about her person. At the extreme end of the same couch, and trailing upon the carpet, lay an elegant dress of blue satin

and velvet; while another of purple velvet and gold, hung over a large arm-chair at the opposite side of the apartment. The dressing-case was strewn with jewels and ornaments of great cost; laces and ribbons protruded from its half-open drawers. Diamonds flashed in the frizzled hair of the dying woman; and on her swollen face rouge and powder mingled in what would have been grotesque confusion, except for the time and place — now they seemed a solemn commentary upon the vanity and vexation of a frivolous life.

Though Miss Weston, as she was here called, had become thoroughly tired of the aimless existence which under the guidance of her benefactress she had so long led; yet she was not ungrateful for the many and great kindnesses she had bestowed upon her, and felt a sincere sorrow at her death. But evidently, she was her only mourner. The rapacious relatives, eager to take possession of the property, settled the estate in the most summary manner.

Mrs. Sidney had once said to Mary that she meant to bequeath her a large portion of her estate. But she dreaded anything in the way

of writing and the fuss of legal business. "There's time enough — I'm just in the prime of life," was her reply to a friend who asked what disposal she intended to make of her wealth.

The relatives had long been jealous of Miss Weston. Now they treated her with the greatest contempt, paying no regard whatever to her feelings. And she soon saw that she was expected to leave the house.

She was not loth to leave; but where could she go? Not to her father's lonely home; for he had taken no notice of the gifts she had repeatedly sent him, and had paid no heed to her last appealing letter. Not to her Aunt Hannah. She had given her to understand long ago that she disowned all relationship with her. And she felt that she had been grievously misunderstood by both father and aunt.

Never, in her most thoughtless moments, had she intended remaining long away from her parents; and when she heard of her mother's death felt great sorrow that she had ever left home — and longed to return thither.

Self-love was a prominent trait in Mary Weston's character, but she was not so thoroughly selfish as her father and some others considered her; this she had made plain to many unprejudiced minds.

Indulged as she had been by her parents, with temper and tastes undisciplined, at the time of her leaving and for a great while afterward she sought only the gratification of self, and giddily fluttered — as gayly as any — among the cotorie of young people that Mrs. Sidney gathered around her. And therein found enjoyment of a certain sort, as all young creatures do in the exercise of mere animal spirits.

Mrs. Sidney took delight in displaying the girl's beauty to best advantage, dressed her finely, and introduced her to fashionable society. This increased her vanity and self-conceit. But it did not bring the happiness she expected. Even to mar her most innocent mirth. thoughts of the less pretentious sports of her humble home would intrude, and she longed for the real, heartfelt pleasure that they always brought. And many

were the nights, after some scene of merriment that had proved hollow and unsatisfactory, when she yearned to feel her mother's good-night kiss; or, after the fatigue and disappointment of some fashionable entertainment, to meet her look of loving pity.

Thus, gradually, the gratification of self, the easy attainment of her wishes, began to work a cure. Finding that her self-centred life knew no real content, no lasting pleasure, she was led to care less for the advancement of plans for her own amusement—became indifferent about everything of the sort—aimed only to make herself useful to her benefactress. At this time she began to see the dishonesty of her conduct in the false excuse she had made for leaving home, and became rigidly watchful over the motives of her speech and conduct, despising now all pretence and deceit.

On receiving the tidings of her mother's death her distress was great. Since then her pillow had been often wet with tears of regret and remorse; and it frequently cost her painful struggles to preserve a cheerful

demeanor through the hours that she must spend in the company of Mrs. Sidney and her friends. Gladly then would she have returned to her father. But so necessary had she become to the comfort of her benefactress, that this lady did not hesitate to make false statements in regard to her father, inducing her to believe that he had lost all love for her. Notwithstanding this, she felt that a life-time of devotion to that father could not make amends for the anxiety and sorrow she must have caused both parents, and she hoped that in some way she might soon be able to convince him of it.

But year after year went on, and still Mary remained with Mrs. Sidney; who, though generous toward her in some ways, was yet imperious and exacting, as well as whimsical and fault-finding, and, still, clinging to her with love like that of a doting parent.

She was at last convinced that as long as the lady lived she must be resigned to these circumstances. She saw that the web by

which she was fettered was of her own weaving — a bitter, bitter truth indeed. Saw too that she was powerless to contend against its restraints; and for the present, there was no prospect of unravelling it, if, indeed, ever.

Nevertheless she had managed latterly to make some efforts toward the expiation of her errors, by sending a few little gifts to her father; and at last, in utter weariness of soul and body, discouraged and disheartened by the increasing worldliness of Mrs. Sidney and the demands she made upon her attention, she had written — humbly begging him to receive her. She hoped long for a reply, and when none came was forced to conclude that he had cast her off forever.— And now, in this emergency, she dared not go to him.

Friends she had; yes, many who called themselves such, in the wide circle of acquaintances who sent cards of condolence just at this time. But not one to whom she could apply for advice. She was alone — absolutely alone in the world — without means

of support, and nobody to care whether she fared well or ill.

Such were Mary Weston's thoughts as she sat in the dusk of her room one evening. It was the evening after Christmas; and, in her loneliness, she forgot that in several poor families her name, most likely, was repeated with gratitude. For she had found some compensation for the unpleasantness and dissatisfaction of her life in being made the almoner of Mrs. Sidney's charities, and her gracious and winning ways had gained her the love of the recipients.

There was to be an auction-sale in the house the next day — the effects of her benefactress were to be disposed of as soon as possible, for the heirs were impatient to receive their portions of the estate.

She heard the loud voices of the relatives in the parlor below. This roused her from her fit of self-commiseration. They were discussing the value of certain pictures and pieces of furniture with a levity that made her shudder, and as they went on to speak of herself she rose and shut the door. She

could not have her temper roused, or her feelings wounded any more deeply than they had been, by their cruel remarks.

By way of diverting her mind from such unpleasant subjects she began to pack her few movables. She had not much that she could call her own. Not a large quantity of clothing, though what she had was nice and in good order. Besides this, a few articles of jewelry and about a dozen books. These were all she claimed, and if Mrs. Sidney considered them gifts, she had more than doubly earned them by her devoted attendance.

While thus engaged, the housekeeper, Mrs. Bond, came in. She had been told that her services were no longer needed and she was ready to leave the next day.

Mrs. Bond knew something of Mary's history, and had shown great interest in her affairs; without being unpleasantly curious had found out how slightly she had been compensated for all she had done. Now she wished to know what plans she had made—where she was going—and what she meant to do.

"I have made no plans. I haven't the least idea what I shall do;" came the almost hopeless reply. "But I cannot—I will not stay here another day, Mrs. Bond."

"Board, I suppose."

"No. I can't—I haven't the means. I must find something to do immediately. But where to go, or where to put these things puzzles me. (She cast her eyes over her trunk and two boxes.) I shall not let them stay here a moment after I go myself."

"O, I'll see to them," was the generous response. "When the dray comes for my boxes he can take these right along too."

"Right along? Where?"

"Why, don't you know? Where I always go when I am out of a place. To my sister Sue's, of course. It won't be any trouble. There's plenty of room in her attic for them. But, dearie me, child! What am I thinking of! *You* must come, too. You can have Sue's spare room as long as you please, I've no doubt."

"Oh, no, no. I can't think of such a thing."

"Oh, yes, yes. You can, and you must. Do you think I'm going to a good, comfortable home this cold winter weather, and leave you to go nobody knows where, after all the good you've done me?"

"Good? I? Have I ever really done you any good, Mrs. Bond?" There was a manifest change in the girl's tone as well as in the expression of her face.

"Bless your heart, dear, haven't I seen how patient you've been with — well, our good lady that was, I guess I better say. I never could have stood her fusses and whimsies without your cheery — 'Pins and needles — needles and pins; never mind, Mrs. Bond.' It wasn't the words so much as the voice. And many's the time they've comforted me, and made me brave to bear and to put up with her many queer freaks. Such wearing ways she did have!"

"Is that all? I never dreamed I was doing you good — not in that way, certainly," said Mary.

"It's a great deal, dearie, according to my way of thinking. It's enough sight harder

to get along with those little, ugly, sharp things than with a big trouble. I never could a-bear little, steady, worrying aches. But give me a stout, deep pain, that means something, and I'm equal to it."

It was getting dark, so Mary lighted the gas while Mrs Bond paused. She had been talking so rapidly, in the excitement of the moment, that she was quite out of breath.

Mary sat down again, and Mrs. Bond continued: "Now I hope you won't think I'm asking too much if I say I want you to stay at Sue's till you can better yourself. It isn't at all likely that a nice young woman like you is going to need a home long. Why, you'll have one of your own soon. You won't have to wait any time for something to turn up, because there's your music. You can earn lots of money, right off, teaching that, if you want to."

"Oh, no, not at present! I'm not in practice."

"Well, well, dear; perhaps you need'nt go right to earning."

"Yes, yes, I must, Mrs. Bond. I haven't a

dollar in the world," was the hasty interruption, in a trembling voice.

"Is that so?" said the kind woman, in tones of commiseration. "Come to Sue's with me then. You mustn't say No."

She saw a negative shake of the head, for Mary was very reluctant.

"We'll talk it all over with her and Isaac. There isn't a sensibler fellow than our Isaac."

Mary well-knew that Mrs. Bond's nephew, Isaac Fay, was a young man of superior abilities, and that Mrs. Bond took a laudable pride in speaking of him and the responsible position he held as confidential clerk in a large warehouse. Though she had never seen him, she had been interested in his aunt's account of him, and had a high opinion of his character and capabilities. But she felt great delicacy about consulting him in relation to employment.

Mrs. Bond saw her hesitation, and said good-humoredly: "You needn't be bashful about going. Mr. Fay's off on one of his Western trips — won't be home till spring; and you needn't mind Isaac — he's a regular old bache-

lor. But he's pleasant as the day is long, and always ready to do a kindness."

Mary burst into tears, and sobbed hysterically. She had struggled hard to control her feelings during the past few days. But the strain had been too much for her — nature at last asserted her power.

"There, there, dear," said Mrs. Bond, "have a good cry. It's the best thing in the world for you. I've watched those big blue veins in your forehead these two days, and it has scared me to see you going about so pale and patient. There, there, I'll be back in a minute." And she hurried from the room.

She soon returned — a cup in her hand. "Some of my valerian, Mary. You must take it — it's so good for the nerves. And then go right to bed; and don't think of anything."

Mary tacitly obeyed the first two directions; the last was impossible. The more she tried not to think the faster came the irrepressible imps of grief and care, dragging from the most sequestered corners of her brain shreds and scraps of faded scenes and long-forgotten words.

Set vividly in the light of her present experience, they seemed the records of some previous existence in a fairer and better world than this; or like the memories of pleasant dreams, when fancy had full play and reason slept.

For several hours she was cognizant of these scenes and ideas. Then thoughts actually blended themselves with dreams, each gradually becoming more and more confused and indistinct till her wearied senses at last sank into the complete oblivion of peaceful sleep.

Before Miss Weston left her room on the following morning, Mrs. Bond tapped at her door, then opened it timidly. "Oh, you are brighter and better dear; I can see you are. I knew the valerian would help you. Here's the drayman. Now for the boxes. I'm going right along too. But you needn't hurry. Come just when you please; no matter if it's dinner-time. I'll fix everything all right for you with Sue and Isaac."

She rattled off her sentences so rapidly Mary had no chance to say a word — felt obliged to acquiesce, which she did with a very good grace, smiling her thanks to the kind creature

as she assisted the drayman, herself, with the heavy trunk.

"Now," said Mary, mentally, as the door closed. "Now I must look things squarely in the face."

She took out her pocket-book, opened all its folds and counted up its contents:

A metropolitan car-ticket, worth five cents; four three-cent postage stamps; a two-cent stamp; two silver quarter-dollars; two half-dimes and two cents. She examined every fold again, hoping to find a stray dime. But there was nothing more.

"Rather short," she whispered, with a gay little laugh. "However, there's something more, as good as money."

Then taking a small morocco-case from her dressing-table, she looked admiringly at a turquoise set — brooch and ear-rings — that it contained; then at the pearl ring she had already placed on her finger. She removed the ring and put it in its little case. This, with the turquoise set she packed closely at the bottom of her shopping-bag.

"For future need," she said, carefully hiding

them with the few articles that had previously filled her bag.

Having taken a survey of the room, as a sort of farewell for the years during which she had known its comforts, she hastily threw on her cloak and hat and passed to the kitchen. Here she knew she should find the servants, for it was nearly breakfast time; they had been kind to her and she must bid them good-by.

That over, and a sad parting it was, sadder than she had expected — she had no idea that they had become so attached to her — she left by the area-gate.

The barrel of waste and ashes from the week's fires stood near, awaiting removal. Over and around this hung the evergreen trimmings, that no one had cared to put up, so sad had Christmas been. Something among the green garlands attracted attention as she passed by. It was but a glimpse, but the thought of it remained in mind. She retraced her steps. "*Amaranths*," she said softly; "I must have them, they look so much like those mother and I used to have

for Christmas;" and drew them from the entangled evergreens.

"A bouquet. It's too bad to throw it away with the refuse." Her hand-bag was unclasped and room for it found within.

She took another look at the flowers before re-clasping the bag. "I didn't know anything but the evergreen trimmings were ordered. But nobody wants this—or it wouldn't have been thrown out. So lovely—too; and it looks so homelike I'll call it my Christmas present—it's all I shall have this year."

With a quickened pace she went on her way.

Mrs. Fay was full of pity for Miss Weston's forlorn condition and immediately granted her sister's request. "The spare room is so seldom occupied she can have it as well as not," she said, and cheerfully made arrangements for receiving her guest.

The neat, cosy room was all ready for Mary when she reached the house. Its pretty muslin curtains were looped back to admit the sunshine, and a good fire was burning in

the stove. Her trunk and boxes had arrived, and were arranged methodically along one side of the chamber. After a brief greeting, Mrs. Fay told her she was welcome to all it contained as long as she could be contented there.

The mellow heat of the fire, the sunshine, the glistening of the best furniture, and the dazzling scarlet and green carpet — all so suggestive of physical comfort and cheer, were as nothing in comparison with Mrs. Fay's cordial tones and the motherly smile that illuminated her homely features.

Little was said. Mary's heart was too full, and both Mrs. Bond and her sister having too much sympathy to obtrude either pity or advice at this moment — prudently left her to herself.

There was much in this chamber and its ornaments to remind Mary of her own pretty room, once so dear, and still pleasantly remembered. These thoughts recalled the amaranths. Taking them carefully from her bag she set them in an empty vase on the mantle. These in their turn revived memories of her

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parents and the happy Christmas of her childhood. And then she called to mind, for nearly the hundredth time, the words of that last letter to her father — those penitent, pleading words — not yet answered. Had she indeed sinned beyond forgiveness? Was she never to return home. Home, *the dear old home*, as it had always been in her heart, notwithstanding the elegancies by which of late years she had been surrounded. She burst into tears; but with sudden resolution choked back her sobs and busied herself in unpacking the boxes. While doing this the exigencies of the present forced themselves upon her consideration, and she determined to start as soon as possible in quest of employment.

She felt persuaded that Mrs. Bond would assume a large share of the expense of this benevolent arrangement she had made with her sister, and she could not take undue advantage of such generosity. Moreover, the idea of being dependent upon Isaac Fay — of course, she reasoned, part of the cost must come upon him — was not to be tolerated.

She would set off instantly. Perhaps she might succeed in getting something to do, even before he came to his two o'clock dinner.

The cloak and hat were on again, and she descending the stairs, in less than an hour after she had entered the house. The sisters were busy in the kitchen, and looked up in surprise as she stood at the door.

"Not going out?" asked Mrs. Bond, with astonishment.

"O yes! I must go; but I hope I shan't be gone long."

"You'll be back at dinner-time?" said Mrs. Fay, with some concern, thinking of the nice dessert she was getting up — expressly for Miss Weston, under Mrs. Bond's directions.

"O certainly! I can't resist Italian cream. Mrs. Bond knows what a quantity I shall want," was the gay rejoinder.

Sober as the undertaking was on which she had started, Mary Weston determined she would not be sad — nor yet get easily discouraged. But she was actually in the street without any settled plan of procedure.

She walked toward the business part of the city, instinctively, with her brain in a whirl, knowing she must decide, and decide quickly, in which direction to turn. But she went on and on, mechanically, unconscious whither her steps were tending, till she found herself among a group of newsboys, each vociferously crying his favorite sheet. The boldest of the boys thrust a paper almost into her grasp.

"The very thing!" she exclaimed; and taking out her pocket-book, slowly unclasped it. She hesitated — "How could she spare the money — though it was only two cents?" said thought.

The boy saucily bade her — "Hurry up!"

That decided the question. He had the coveted two cents and she the paper — which she found to be in truth the very thing she needed; for a long column of Wants quickly caught her eye, and its first two-line advertisement suited her case exactly. Unmindful of the jostling crowd, she read this as she moved on. Then made the best of her way to the place designated.

It was a high brick building in a narrow court. Up three flights of stairs she toiled before finding the number mentioned. A lawyer's office was this, and a copyist needed.

She stood at the desk and wrote rapidly a few lines in her clear, neat hand. Her services were in immediate requisition, but at a ridiculously low price — which the proprietor well knew, yet she, in her ignorance of business matters, considered reasonable. In fact, she was so thankful for this opportunity of earning, even if it were but a small pittance, she went about the work with alacrity.

So absorbed did she become that time passed without notice. The office-clock striking two startled her. "Mrs. Fay's dinner-hour! What would they think?" She felt distressed and mortified. But she would go now, with all speed and make a humble apology for being late.

"No. She could not be excused from the copying," Her employer was inexorable. "The office did not close till four o'clock. That was the rule and she must abide by it."

So till four o'clock she scratched on in a

most unhappy frame of mind. With the last stroke of the hour she gathered up her papers, and, hurrying on her hat and cloak, was downstairs and through the court before her absence was noticed.

Much to her dismay, she found that not only the two kind women who had taken such pride and pleasure in preparing a nice dinner for her were patiently waiting her return, but Isaac too was waiting — not very patiently, it must be confessed, but with all proper respect. He was a pleasant-faced man, a few years her senior. "One to be depended upon," she thought, meeting the look of his large grey eyes. Though somewhat embarrassed, she answered the questioning of all three in a straightforward manner, giving a good account of her morning's adventures.

"I know I am too impulsive — impetuous, rather," she said. "*Headstrong*, that's the word, perhaps. But I thought I might strike out at once for myself."

"And your thought was right," said Isaac, who admired the resolution and independence she had shown, though he spoke disparagingly

of her employer, and said she must not think of working for so small pay.

"But it is better than nothing," she replied. "Still, I am sorry to have caused you all so much trouble and anxiety, and will give up the place and get a situation that will not interfere with your usual arrangements."

"Don't be in a hurry," said Mrs. Bond. "You have had so much lately to worry you, you had better take a few days of quiet rest. I'm afraid you are attempting too much — you are not used to steady, close work, you know."

"Take a vacation till after New Year's," said kind Mrs. Fay. "We shall hear of something by that time, I guess. And Isaac will be on the look-out. He'll know what's desirable."

Mary tried hard to conceal the distress she felt at these last words, but the color rushed painfully to her face.

Isaac saw this, and remarked in a careless way: "Miss Weston is the best judge of the matter. She knows what she can do — what she would like to do. And the experience of this morning has taught her how to proceed."

Mary gave him a grateful glance. She saw that he appreciated her motive and respected it; moreover, that he had a good opinion of her sagacity and judgment, and he advanced several steps in her estimation. Homely and awkward in person and manner, yet the delicacy with which he had declined interfering with her affairs convinced her that he was a true gentleman, and before this first interview ended she was nearly ready to adopt his aunt's phraseology, and declare there wasn't "a sensibler fellow in the world than Isaac Fay."

CHAPTER XII.

MARY WESTON'S GOOD WORK.

MARY Weston went to her employer's office the next day, resigned her place, and received her wages — fifty cents. A meagre sum indeed. But she took it thankfully, and in good courage, cheerfully sought another situation. Studying the Wants in her newspaper, she had selected several which she felt competent to supply. To that seeming the most desirable she applied first. The vacancy was already filled. Nothing daunted she passed on to the others in succession, with a like result.

Her enthusiasm had abated somewhat by this time, but she was not discouraged. Still

she concluded she had done enough for one day; going up so many flights of steep stairs had brought on a violent headache. Perhaps a walk in the fresh breeze now sweeping over the Common would set this right and give her opportunity to think what next to do. There was ample time — the clock had but just struck twelve. She directed her steps thither. The weather was so fine that the pavements were crowded with a busy throng, among which she moved slowly, wrapped in thought, unheeding all around.

But suddenly a shrill cry — a child's cry — arrested the hurrying crowd. She stopped also, for she knew the voice. It was that of a little girl in whom she had become interested a few months previous, whose miserable home she had several times visited, carrying food and clothing.

The child recognized her instantly, exclaiming, "O Miss Weston, Miss Weston!" and rising from the icy stones on which she had fallen, laid hold of her cloak.

The crowd, greatly augmented by this delay, jostled rudely past while Mary endeavored to

soothe and hush the little girl. She soon found that the outcry was not for pain — there was only a slight bruise on the child's hand — but for the loss of a bottle of medicine she had been sent to procure for her sick mother. In her fall the bottle was broken and its contents wasted. The child was soon comforted — more than that — made extremely happy, for Miss Weston went with her to the druggist's to get more medicine and said she would go with her to see her sick mother.

Not only the fifty cents, so recently and so hardly earned, were needed to replace the medicine, but one of Mary's two silver quarters. "Poor thing, she shall have it," she thought. "I shall get something to do to-morrow."

"Now, Barbara," she said with a merry laugh, "we mustn't lose this. I'll carry it, and you must look out that I don't fall. Run along and find the best crossings. I'll follow."

The delighted Barbara, drawing her ragged shawl closely about her neck and shoulders, set off at a rapid pace, now and then turning with an arch look to see if Miss Weston were as good as her word, till she drew near the

old tenement house that she called home.

Several dirty children were gathered about the door-step; cold as the day was, shoeless and hatless, hovering together in the sunshine. Seeing Miss Weston they scampered, like so many young rats, toward an adjacent stable, while Barbara proudly advanced, opened the door, and held it open till her good friend had passed in.

Barbara's mother, impatient over the child's absence, greeted the opening of the door with querulous command for the medicine. But when she saw the visitor, changed her tone to one of whining misery. Barbara, little woman that she was, though scarcely eight years old, tried to hush the noisy children — boys of five, four and two, who were eager to see and talk with Miss Weston.

Mary listened patiently to the pitiful tale of pain and want that the woman had to tell. The doctor had prescribed medicine for which Barbara had been sent with all the money her husband had earned for a week. He had now gone in search of employment to find means to get food for the day.

Having administered the medicine, and made the wretched bed rather more comfortable, Mary bade the children keep quiet while she went away a few minutes.

She returned shortly with a large package; and a boy followed, bringing a basket holding smaller packages. The hungry children were soon *devouring* the bread she had bought. Materials for more bread, which she knew bright little Barbara could make, and meat for the father when he should return, were laid in the closet. Then she busied herself in making gruel for the mother. To pay for these things her funds had been sadly depleted. She had now but one half-dime and one cent — postage stamps and car-ticket had been taken by the provision dealer rather than not sell the meat.

"They must have it. I can get along somehow," she said to herself as she paid the man.

She had finished the gruel, and had just prevailed upon the sick woman to take a spoonful as the doctor came in. He had once been a visitor at Mrs. Sidney's. But Mary had not seen him for three years. He recognized

her, instantly, and a glow of delight suffused his fine features as he extended his hand in salutation. "An unexpected pleasure! A most agreeable surprise," he said. "And yet, Miss Weston, I am sorry to see you here."

She withdrew the hand which he had retained, and gave him a questioning glance.

"It is no place for you," he went on. "This is fever — a bad case; and it will probably go through the family. You ought not to have exposed yourself to it. You must leave at once."

"Who will care for this poor mother? she asked.

"Barbara. Oh, Barbara," said the mother, moaning piteously. "She's smart enough — she'll do anything."

"Have you no one else?"

"Only father — the children's father. Poor fellow, he does the best he can."

"She ought to have a nurse," said the doctor.

"We've no money to pay a nurse," said the woman, dolefully.

"Dr. Thornton," said Mary, "suppose you al-

low me to do as I think best in this matter. You once thought my suggestions worth following?"

"Or I should not have been here in this capacity. You must be fully aware of that." He spoke earnestly — almost as if in reverence.

"You have been successful —" Mary's voice was getting tremulous.

"Beyond my most sanguine expectations. Only through the most persistent perseverance, however."

"So disheartened, so sure you never could succeed, once," returned Mary, with a smile. "But where have you kept yourself since you finished your studies?"

"Among the poor, principally. Not always in the city. Last year I tried country practice. But I have a wider field in the city; so I returned, a short time since. I have often wished to meet you. But in order to carry out my studies — I am still a student — shall always be one — I have no time for fashionable society. Now I have my wish, and I trust I shall see you often."

"If you do your duty faithfully toward this case," she rejoined playfully, glancing in the direction of the sick woman; who was complaining loudly and wondered if they would ever cease talking.

"Why, Miss Weston, you must not think of coming here again at present. It is too dangerous."

"Dr. Thornton," said she, with great dignity, "I must. You will remain with your patient half an hour. At the end of that time I will be back here again, and do the best I can for her."

She was putting on her hat, and then fastened her cloak as she spoke.

"No, no. I insist," said Dr. Thornton, in his gravest tones. Don't come back. Remain here that half-hour, if you will — now that you have come, while I try to get a nurse." And he laid his hand on the door-latch.

"And *I* insist. Indulge me, please, this once," she said in a voice of entreaty, her eyes filling with tears, as she strove with a slight touch to remove that firm, strong hand.

Light and uncertain as the touch of those

delicate fingers was it prevailed, for the doctor turned aside; and she was gone.

He went to the bedside, the children clustering around him. But he did not, as usual, give them a gay word, and a few peanuts or bits of candy from his pocket — was unconscious of their presence. Never before had he been so interested in this patient. He investigated her symptoms closely; he prepared and administered her medicine; warmed gruel, and gave that; smoothed the pillows, and straightened the shabby bedclothes — all in the most tender manner. Then he took the youngest child on his knee — it had been so persistent in its advances — and asked about the family, found out that Miss Weston had been very good to them — called often to see what they wanted — and never came empty-handed.

The woman interspersed her narration with moans of distress, threats to the children, and commands to Barbara to keep them more quiet. And the indefatigable Barbara not only strove to do this, but made desperate efforts to wash the face and smooth the hair

of Charlie-boy," as she called him, perched upon the doctor's knee.

And Barbara's black eyes shone with delight as Dr. Thornton laid his hand lightly on her own nicely brushed locks, and said gently, "That's right, my little woman," and then, with a small shower of broken candy among the half-score of little hands outstretched for his bounty, "Now take the boys away. Your mother must sleep."

They went to a small inner apartment, their sleeping-room. There was no fire; but she huddled them all around her, and told them stories from a wonderful picture-book he had once given her.

Meanwhile the doctor watched beside the sick mother, who, soothed by his kind services, became less querulous, and ceased the nervous tossing of hands and head.

The room was getting chilly, he replenished the fire and again resumed his seat. Miss Weston must be here soon. Was there ever such a long half-hour?

He looked at his watch. Ten minutes yet.

He rose, turned aside the curtain and looked out on a collection of old carriages and sheds ornamented with dingy horse-blankets. With an air of disgust he dropped the curtain again and took once more his seat by the bed. His patient was asleep, and soon his thoughts wandered far away from her.

Miss Weston at this time had already started to return, hoping to arrive before the half-hour had elapsed. Yet she was half an hour beyond it.

The doctor's waiting grew tedious — then anxious; knowing the strict integrity of Miss Weston's word he feared accident — then some awful catastrophe.

When Mary left she felt that Mrs. Crowley, the sick woman, must have constant attention. But just then she could not stay. Mrs. Fay's dinner-hour was near, it was her duty to be punctual to-day. There was a long walk before her and she hurried on. The bracing air was exhilarating. Her headache had gone, and she was in fine spirits.

She met Isaac Fay just at the corner of the street before reaching the house. He

seldom noticed ladies. But he was scrupulously polite, and Mary giving him a brisk little nod, he could do no less than tarry for her. He flattered himself that he was not interested in her affairs. But at intervals during the forenoon he had caught himself wondering how she was getting on — if she had found a better situation than that of yesterday. And as he came up the street he had looked sharply to see if she were coming.

He didn't relish cold dinners — it was that, no doubt. It couldn't be that he wished so much to see her, to talk with her. Yet she had a very pleasant voice — he was willing to allow that. And when she talked she had something worth saying. And she could listen too, which many women could not, or would not, do. A sign of good sense was this, certainly. Her smile, too, there was something downright honest and sincere in that; — and earnest, one couldn't fail to mark that — no half-way measures suited her. But her she was — right before him, smile and all. A dimple, too, just like his mother's; he no ticed it now for the first time.

With a genial little laugh she met his steady admiring gaze, said something bright about the weather, and by her own brisk pace induced him to quicken his; so that they were both within doors before the clock struck two.

Mrs. Bond was highly pleased at such promptness, yet more pleased that they came together. And Mrs. Fay, conscious of her successful cookery, showed her dimples to such an extent while serving the vegetables to Isaac's relay of roast chicken, that, in his attempt to compare said dimples with Miss Weston's he so far forgot himself as to set the carving-fork within the gravy-boat, instead of on its rest; thereby evoking an exclamation of dismay from his aunt at the threatened inundation of the best table-cloth, but there was only an overflow of a few drops.

Passing lightly over her own concerns, Mary graphically described Barbara's accident, and told the miseries of the sick woman and her family.

"I can get the father a place in a day or two," said Isaac. "A stevedore is wanted

in Nolan's place — he leaves to-morrow to go to Colorado. I know Crowley, have seen him, at odd jobs on the wharf; and he shall come in when Nolan goes out. Mother, can't you find something in the pantry for them? Enough for a day or two? He'll earn a decent living for his family after that."

Mrs. Fay "could spare them considerable," she said, "for to-morrow will be baking-day, and, Isaac you can take a basket of things right along after dinner."

The meal was quickly dispatched. Mary went to her room and filled a satchel with such articles as she might need for her own use while with Mrs. Crowley. Her eye fell on the amaranths, and, taking a few, she placed them in the braids of her hair. She could not bear to leave them all; it would be like turning her back again upon home. Bidding her friends good by, she said she intended staying with Mrs. Crowley until she should be better, and was hurrying away.

"Are you not imprudent?" asked Mrs. Bond. "Is it right for you to run the risk of taking the fever?"

"Some one must take the risk," she answered. "There is nothing to prevent my nursing her. But I hope to get through without catching the fever. It seems to be the place for me just now, and I am glad of the employment."

Isaac was ready with the basket, and they went together. He proposed going to a furniture-dealer's, for Miss Weston had shown there was great need of a better bed and more comfortable bedding. She consented, though by so doing her half-hour of absence would be exceeded. Then there was a long way to the coal-yard. And then he thought they might as well stop at a second-hand stove-store and get something to warm that cold inner room. So by the time she was once more at the Crowley's nearly an hour had elapsed.

Dr. Thornton scrutinized the young man bearing the basket very closely; noticed how respectful he was in parting with Miss Weston — noted the very expression of his eyes as they lingered on her face. He could not see her face. And yet — well, his thoughts were none of the happiest just at that moment,

though he greeted her very pleasantly. As she took off her hat one of the amaranths fell from her hair, without her knowledge. He picked it up and put it hastily in his vest-pocket. He left soon after, promising to call early the next day; giving her many directions — not only for the care of his patient but for her own safety from contagion — as he tarried at the door, endeavoring at the same time to read her thoughts in her countenance. But he saw nothing satisfactory there.

He had heard of the death of Mrs. Sidney. He knew nothing of her affairs, nor of Miss Weston's. Most likely Mrs. Sidney had provided well for her adopted daughter — as Mary was considered. Still, he felt some curiosity — some concern — about her circumstances, now that he had met her. Yet he could not, he dared not, question her. Once he might have had that right; but it was long since.

Could time once lost ever be redeemed? He had sometimes though so, latterly. Would opportunities wasted thoughtlessly ever be

restored? It was not to be expected. But might not others of equal value be granted? Possibly. He would try to believe that. And, in the hope of these, task and toil should be welcome.

The new bed and the stove came before night, and with Barbara's help everything was in readiness to move the sick one when the father came home. The children, quieted by an ample supper, went to bed early, in the outer room — after it had been ventilated and made comparatively neat.

It is not necessary to mention all that Mary Weston did for that family during the mother's illness. Over four weeks she remained with them, only leaving for a short walk occasionally, or a call at Mrs. Fay's. Isaac Fay came to the door every morning to enquire after her health, and one day sent a lounge for her own particular use in the sick room.

Dr. Thornton was regular in his visits spoke with great approbation of Miss Weston's nursing, and praised Barbara for the neatness of the house and the tidy appearance of the children; though he felt persuaded that it

was all accomplished through Mary's means, and that her faithful care had much to do with the favorable turn of the fever.

When Mrs. Crowley was able to take her place with her family Miss Weston returned to Mrs. Fay's. Happy in the consciousness of having accomplished some good work, she was stronger than ever in her resolution and self-reliance — though poorer than ever. For nothing now remained of her earthly possessions save her wearing apparel and her books. To procure comfortable clothing for the Crowley children she had sold her turquoise set the second week of her stay among them. She took no little pride and pleasure in so doing, for she had never cared for jewelry — seldom wore those ornaments during Mrs. Sidney's lifetime — and since her death only looked upon them as available property. Her pearl ring went for medicine and delicacies for the sick mother, and help toward paying the doctor's bill. The few stray cents that she had when she left she gave to the children. Poor little Barbara knowing it to be a parting gift, cried sadly when she took her share, and wore the

battered copper for a locket a long, long time. Yet little did she think it was Miss Weston's last cent.

Dr. Thornton had not found the opportunity he desired, and was much disappointed one day, when he called to see if the Crowley children were still in good health, to hear that Miss Weston left the previous evening and that none of the family knew where her home was. In fact, Barbara informed him that she had no home. He was surprised at this, but thought she had made a childish blunder; she certainly must have a home somewhere in the city. He would have liked specific information on this point. But, however, he should undoubtedly meet her again soon, he thought, in some of her charitable expeditions, and when that did occur he should use his best endeavors to find out all he wished to know. Thus he reasoned with himself, and went more enthusiastically than ever through the duties of his profession.

Midwinter came; Mary Weston had found no employment. She was still at the Fays — seldom there except evenings, however, for she spent the larger part of each day in search of

work. Any honest work was now her quest. But there were so many others in the same pursuit that she began to be a little disheartened. Mrs. Bond had gone to visit a friend in the country; and Isaac and his mother forbore to question Miss Weston when they found, day after day, that she had the same reply. "If she had anything pleasant to communicate they were sure to hear it; and when success came they should know it," they said each to the other. So the days went on.

Occasionally Mary met one of her old acquaintances — friends they considered themselves — who were always very pleased to see her, and enquired kindly after her health. That was all. Yet most of them must have known of her loneliness and of her straitened circumstances.

She did not lose her buoyancy, and her sprightliness kept the Fays in ignorance of her extreme poverty. She had good health, that was one comfort; was truly thankful for this every morning of her life, she said to herself, as she set off on her errand, now getting so irksome. And she would not be so dependant

on these good friends — she decided that one day — she could go without her dinner. So, leaving word that she should stay down town till five o'clock, she made up her mind that she would take a walk on the Common at dinner-time.

The daily paper that Isaac Fay brought home every evening had been of great use in her search for employment. This morning she took it with her, and went thoroughly down the list of Help Wanted. Every situation was already filled when she applied.

She took her walk as she had determined, and walked till so tired, and faint also from want of food, that she was obliged to sit down to rest upon a seat. Two gentlemen passed by, conversing earnestly. One said, "Do you know where I can get such a nurse?"

The other shook his head, and said something in such a sad tone that Mary rose, and bowing politely, asked if a nurse was wanted.

They both answered in the affirmative, scanning her closely.

She replied that she should like the situation,

referred them to Dr. Thornton, and gave her name.

"Thomas," said one, "I think she will do. Go and find Thornton and meet us at the asylum in the course of an hour. I will take Miss Weston there."

"The asylum — among the insane! I cannot," thought Mary. "But — yes, here is employment."

Her many prayers were at last answered though not in the way she had expected. God was wiser than she. He was sending her. "I must go," she said mentally.

Her companion noticed the troubled expression that flitted over her face at the mention of the asylum, and said quickly — "It is an interesting case, this lady that you are to attend. Not a difficult one by any means. And it seems to me (I can read physiognomy pretty well) that you will get on nicely with her. Will you take the next car out? Or perhaps you wish to go home first. There is little time to spare — what is your decision?"

Hesitating a moment, she concluded that she had better return to Mrs. Fay's, pack her

trunk and give directions for having all her effects sent the next day. So, saying she would be at the asylum before six o'clock, she turned down a cross street and went rapidly on her way, just as the gentleman hailed an approaching car.

Mrs. Fay was glad of Miss Weston's success at last, though truly sorry to lose her pleasant company. "And Isaac will be so astonished! I don't know how he will get over it — not even a word of good-by."

But Miss Weston hoped to come to the city now and then. And perhaps Mrs. Fay and Isaac might be allowed to call on her. She would make enquiries about that. She was very grateful for all their kindness to her, and hoped sometime to be able to repay them.

"Nonsense, nonsense, child," said the kind woman. "Go and pack your trunk, while I make you a cup of tea; you are not going off without some sort of a supper."

It took but few minutes to pack the trunk. By close contrivance everything, even the amaranths, went in. And then she was

ready for the cup of tea, which she really needed — not a morsel of food or drink had passed her lips since morning.

She could not talk much, for, now that she was leaving this hospitable family, she was sorry to go. She dreaded, too, the responsibilities of the position. In fact, it did not seem even so desirable as at first. But she must do something, and this only had offered.

They parted with a silent grasp of the hand. But Mrs. Fay, recollecting afterward the sober compression of Mary's lips and her hot and glazed eyes, shouted from the door, "Keep up a good heart, child! You'll do well."

Mary stepped back and kissed the homely face, beaming with motherly pity and affection.

"There — there — poor lamb!" said Mrs. Fay, returning the caress with profusion. "You've come to a pretty dark mountain, dear; but, for all that, your feet needn't stumble. You know who it is that carries the lambs in his bosom? You'll go up safely, never fear."

The tears in Mary's eyes did not fall. The compressed lips broke into a smile, bright as a sunbeam from some heavy cloud, and she went buoyantly on her way.

Dr. Thornton was not to be found. After long waiting and much search, Dr. Thomas concluded to meet Mr. Wareham, the gentleman who had taken the car to go to the asylum, and propose engaging Miss Weston on trial. That arrangement would serve their purpose. "In the course of that time they could see Thornton," he said, "and get his opinion." Before the week was ended he assured Mr. Wareham there was no need of seeing Dr. Thornton. "No one could do better. I wish we had twenty such nurses; your mother is getting attached to her already."

Mary Weston found much that was disagreeable in her new vocation. But she felt a great pity for the old lady of her care. Had she been her own mother she could not have treated her more tenderly. Ministering day after day to her wants, and listening to the wanderings of her beclouded mind,

recalled the memory of that mother; and the regrets that always accompanied that memory led her to great patience with Mrs. Wareham. Months passed in this manner; her cheerfulness and patience wrought wonders. The melancholy, under which the poor lady had so long labored that dementia had followed — yielded to the bright, hopeful management; and reason began, though slowly, to reassert her sway; so Mary kept up her courage, unflagging when many would have given up in despair, the progress was so slow.

But she shrank involuntarily from contact with the more noisy and violent patients. Yet, more than one learned to watch for her smile or the kind word that she gave in passing; and the frantic shriek would be instantly hushed, the threatening gesture changed to a childish grimace, at a glimpse of her graceful figure.

Sometimes she thought of her father, hoped that he was well, and that she might soon gain his love and confidence. He had known of her home with Mrs. Sidney, and

it was probable that he had heard of that lady's death. Still she was reluctant to inform him of her present occupation; reluctant to write at all, since that last humble letter had been disregarded. Neither did she send him gifts, as had been her custom during the past few years. She was waiting — had no distinct idea for what — but was impressed with the idea that she must wait for something to occur before she again sent or wrote.

Earning now good wages that were promptly paid, Mary was in a more comfortable state pecuniarily than she had ever been. But the asylum was not home — never could be home, though she stayed there years, as some of the nurses had done.

Mrs. Fay and Isaac came one day for a short call. Visitors were not desirable to the officers of the institution, so they had not called again. Probably they were well, though she had heard nothing from them — nor from Mrs. Bond — they were not letter-writing people, she knew.

By spring she had become accustomed to

the routine of her duties, and began to realize her isolation from the world. Yet was not unhappy. She was doing with her might, with all her capacity, in singleness of purpose, the duties that lay nearest to the path appointed her to tread; and the consciousness of this filled her heart with a calm content, the nearest approach to peace that she had ever experienced.

The Christmas amaranths reminded her so strongly of home that she gave them a conspicuous place in her sleeping apartment. Had she been aware that they once were actually inmates of that home she could not have regarded them with greater reverence.

CHAPTER XIII.

AUNT HANNAH'S VISIT.

MANY were the storms of snow and sleet during that hard, cold winter. Everybody longed for warm weather, and watched eagerly all signs of its approach.

Spring came at last, and gardening operations were resumed. Uncle Mark was very busy. Mrs. White said he had never taken such pains to have early vegetables; and he had been remarkably patient with the girls, who changed their minds about the shape of the flower-plats, or as to the plants, half-a-dozen times, through all their planning and blundering, doing and undoing just when and where they wished. He now had always a

pleasant word for all whom he met; and was "really getting handsome in his old age," she declared one day to his sister — Aunt Hannah — as every one called her because Uncle Mark did — and who had come to pass May and June in the country.

It was years since Miss Hannah Weston had visited her brother, and it was quite evident that this visit was not from any great interest in him; indeed she said herself that she came on account of her health — to see if a change of air would help her asthma.

She was a tall, angular woman somewhat advanced in life, and from the antiquated style of her dress looking much older than her years. "Her old brown gown must have come out of the ark!" exclaimed Alice White, after Aunt Hannah's call at Pleasant Hill. "And as to her bonnet and green veil, they wouldn't have been so stained and limp if Mrs. Noah had owned an 'amberrill,' as she calls it, to lend her when she came away."

"How poky and fussy," said Edith. "I wish she wouldn't set foot in my garden

again. What right had she to pull up my portulaccas that I've had so much trouble to coax along?"

"'Thought they were weeds,' she told me, and said they had no business there. *Pusley*, that's what she said they were, only fit for pigs," replied Alice.

"'Pusley!' *My lovely darlings!* Oh, it makes me almost cry to think of them. And my mignonette, too, trampled right down by her great, heavy feet! I feel provoked to have mother so polite to her, telling her she might walk in the garden any time — and come as often as she wished."

"She had to — for Uncle Mark's sake — you know," rejoined Alice.

"Uncle Mark! — I don't see how he can endure her — pulling this and poking that; and 'What's the good of such rubbish?' and 'Why don't ye do this?' and 'Why don't ye do that?' every other minute. Oh! I say she's a perfect torment — so *there*." And the irritated Edith used her trowel with such energy in trying to repair damages that she added to the ruin already made.

Tall and stiff as Aunt Hannah was in personal appearance, she was yet more perpendicular and unyielding in her ideas. Though very fond of her neice, Mary, as a child, and proud then of her beauty and abilities, she had been sternly uncompromising toward her since. Nothing could induce her to believe that the girl had not intentionally deceived her parents and deliberately deserted them. And all these years since then her heart had been growing more and more bitter against her. She would not by any means improve, in her opinion.

Uncle Mark, finding that any excuse he might make for Mary only led to greater severity of denunciation on her part, at last ceased all allusion to his daughter. And Mrs. Grey soon saw that the best way to get along comfortably with Uncle Mark's sister, who made herself familiar with her and her affairs, was to ignore her presence as much as possible, and turn a deaf ear to all unpleasant questions and remarks.

Not a speck of dirt, not a frayed edge, not the least sign of litter or disorder, escaped her

notice. Besides keeping her brother and the internal arrangements of his home in the most perfect order and cleanliness, she hated clutter so much that she spent nearly half her time, broom in hand, cleaning away the falling blossoms of the elm-tree that shaded the south side of the house. "The troublesome things! they'd worry my life out, if I lived here. What do you have a tree so near the house for?" she once said to Uncle Mark.

"Phebe set it out, when it was small," replied he; "and the south room is pleasanter for it. She never found any fault with it. The droppings never troubled her. And there wasn't a nicer woman anywhere; isn't now, as I see."

Aunt Hannah said no more against the elm, but she kept the ground that it overshadowed hard and clean as a pavement with her constant sweeping.

Ellen often made herself merry over the old woman's complaints about rubbish. Whenever she saw her coming she was sure to take the children out of the way and keep them still as mice; for Tommy had gained her ill-

will at the first by his curiosity as to what she had in the great velvet bag that she carried and by asking who gave her such a funny bonnet. He could speak plainly now, and was apt to make original remarks. It was most prudent to send him out of her sight. And Aunt Hannah disliked babies — "couldn't bear them;" so little Mary Alison, now so interesting to most of Mrs. Grey's visitors, was also banished from the parlor when she came in.

Patience trembled whenever she caught a glimpse of the old green veil, for it was thrown back within doors, and she dreaded the scrutiny of the bead-like black eyes, in the gold bowed spectacles, then allowed free course. With one glance they seemed to pierce the poor child through and through. No wonder she trembled and shrank from that glance, for she had heard her say she could read faces like a book, and Pashie felt certain she could perceive nothing lovely about herself there.

On the whole her visit benefited Uncle Mark, for she put his ward-robe in better order than it had been for years. She her-

self improved in health, for so much exercise in the open air, which her efforts at neatness occasioned was of course invigorating. But she was glad to return to the city before the hottest weather came — "To get out of the sun," she said. "High buildings make a nice shade; and there's lots of them in town." And he was not sorry to be left to himself once more.

Mrs. Grey could but echo Mrs. White and her girls in the hope that Aunt Hannah would never need a change of air again: while Ellen and Patience did not hesitate to speak of the relief her return had given.

As the spring advanced Patience rallied a little, was able to walk with a cane to the door, but she stooped and one shoulder was much higher than the other. Still, she was stronger, and the hectic of the winter seemed subdued. As the beautiful days of June brought a more healthy color to her cheek, and also an eager desire to be out of doors, Ellen and Uncle Mark often carried her in her arm-chair to the shade of the elm; and and there she would sit, sometimes for hours,

watching the children of the neighborhood, among whom was Tommy, in their play; and sometimes joining in their gleeful shouts. The baby could now walk, and speak a few words, and amused herself in picking blades of grass and green leaves from the few weeds around and placing them in her mother's hair or on Pashie's lap; for Mrs. Alison frequently sat on a low stool near Patience, while busily sewing, and keeping watch over her children. Occasionally Mrs. Grey took her work and sat with them.

One afternoon this little group was startled by a joyful cry. Dan stood before them, and Patience felt herself lifted into a nice wheel-chair that he had brought. Dr. Mullins had not been so generous with rides as her former doctor, and no one else had ever offered to take her. Now she could have rides enough. She was over-joyed — could not find words to express her thanks and delight.

During his week's visit Dan was ready at any time to "propel the machine." If she remonstrated, it was — "Nothing but play, sheer play, to what delving in the mines is; and I

want it for amusement, little sis;" and a jolly frolic he made of it, wheeling her all about the neighborhood.

Dan's coming was a great surprise. His mother had hoped, but hardly expected it, because his letters spoke of the great need of more men yet, that operations went on night and day; and she wished him to be faithful to the interests of his employers. He was so great a favorite, however, (and that means so diligent and trustworthy) that when he asked for a few days absence to visit his invalid sister a week was readily granted him.

Nobody enjoyed this visit more than Uncle Mark. The disappointed hopes of Christmas were the topic of several conversations, for he had long wished to talk the matter over with Dan. Finally, Dan went to Mr. Lancaster, to ascertain just how much he had accomplished in the search for Mary; and only learned that neither he or Mrs. Norton, who had hoped to obtain some information, had been able to discover the least trace relating to her.

There were days when Uncle Mark was

disposed to think she had died, or that because he had not answered her letter she would never write, would never send to him again; and he felt deep regret that he had not sooner taken the charitable views of her life that he now held. At such times he was dull and taciturn. Mrs. Grey was quick to perceive these moods, and quietly led him to a discussion, which never failed to give him comfort, and restore him to hopefulness. She had great faith in Mary's return, eventually, and Dan readily adopted her opinions. Still he could not understand her disappearance from the city — that seemed mysterious.

Mrs. White was glad to know through Dan that Ralph, though not in full health, was able to work, and orderly and steady in his conduct. When Dan went back he took as a present to him a large basket filled with the fruit and vegetables of Pleasant Hill.

The summer passed quickly; autumn came again; and soon winter was at the door. Mrs. Grey, with her family, happy and contented, though Patience was obliged when the frost came to give up all out-of-door excursions, and

only took an occasional ride through the rooms, Ellen or Uncle Mark "propelling the machine" now, considered herself a fortunate woman; yet her funds were so low that she could only purchase a barrel of coal and a basket of wood when she went in October to replenish her fuel for the coming season.

But Mr. Browning had not forgotten her. Frequently during the summer had he sent her parcels, little dainties these were, intended for Pashie's capricious appetite. And he had called occasionally. She felt persuaded that if they came to actual want he would be as ready with assistance as he had been the last winter. But as long as Ellen and herself had plenty of sewing and Dan was able to maintain himself she had no fears of that.

And neither did Mary Weston dread the winter, dreary as the seclusion of the asylum might at that season be to some. Mrs. Wareham, her charge, had improved more rapidly after the heat of summer had passed; and Mary greatly enjoyed her companionship. The faculty now considered her sane and in comfortable health. So she was not sur-

prised that on one of those golden days of early November, when all nature seems in a peaceful enthanasia, her son should come to convey her home.

But, much as the good lady wished to return to her relatives, she was reluctant to go, so fond had she become of Mary. The parting between them was painful, for Mary also had learned to love her dearly.

Mr. Wareham, in his gratitude for Miss Weston's faithful care, left in the hands of the superintendant a handsome sum of money as a present for her; knowing her delicacy of feeling he shrank from offering it in person. Proud and happy was she to receive this, the largest sum she had ever possessed, and in her heart she dedicated it to her father's use. When by her earnings she had increased it sufficiently to warrant taking the step, she determined to seek her father, make one more effort to obtain his favor, and devote herself to the promotion of his comfort for the remainder of his life.

Mary's next charge was a young lady suffering the results of an over-taxed brain.

It was a sad, sad case, for which there could be no cure. Mary's task was to provide light occupation, or amusement, that should serve to engage the constant attention of the patient, to divert her mind from the extravagant fancies by which it was possessed. This required great ingenuity, as well as presence of mind and a gentle firmness. Her duties were much more arduous than those rendered Mrs. Wareham; but she went through them with fortitude and perseverance.

About this time, Isaac Fay, having heard of Mrs. Wareham's recovery, walked out one day at his mother's request to enquire for Miss Weston's health; and to ask if she would not now seek some employment in the city and become again one of their family.

Glad indeed was Mary to see him, and to know that his mother and aunt were well. But he could not persuade her to leave her present situation. She expressed much gratitude for their kind wishes; yet, as her services were needed here, so long as her

health was good she felt it would be wrong for her to make any change.

Too bashful to urge his plea on the score of care to keep her health good he went home to tell his mother of Mary's excessive paleness. This so troubled the kind woman, in addition to her son's disappointment — for this return of Mary was *his* plan — that she went herself the next morning and insisted on a visit.

"A week, certainly, child," she said. "If you don't have a respite once in a while you'll get crazy, yourself. I should be a regular Madge Wildfire, as crank as a hawk, to stay here three days among such sights and sounds."

She carried her point. The superintendant was too anxious to retain Miss Weston permanently to refuse her this short vacation.

The week passed very pleasantly. Isaac, knowing her fondness for music, took her to a concert one evening; on another to a lecture; in fact, showed her great politeness, and, it was evident, enjoyed her visit exceedingly. And Mrs. Fay and her sister

were as happy as possible. Mr. Fay, now at home, seeing Mary for the first time, took a great liking to her, prompted Isaac to many kind attentions; and when his son was absent — at his usual daily duties — took upon himself to be her escort about the city, or entertained her at home with interesting details of his western trips.

In truth Mary was delighted to receive these marks of esteem and affection. Yet uneasy and sorry, when she gave herself time to consider them; especially when she thought of Isaac's great kindness. But she could not, she dared not, refuse, any of his attentions. It would be too cruel, too rude, she reasoned — here, in his own home, whose hospitality she had once been so glad to accept.

And yet she felt in her heart that it must not go on; — it was well she was to be there only for this short visit. With greater relief than she had anticipated, she returned to the asylum, and went on with her work there, longing for the time when she could begin her plan for going to her father.

Early in December she received a letter

from Mr. Wareham. His mother had died, after a few days' illness, of pneumonia. He also informed her that — "he was pleased to say, that by her last will she had bequeathed her faithful friend and nurse, Mary Weston, one-fifth of her estate; the amount at present could not be determined — probably it would be sufficient to place her in comfortable circumstances for the rest of her life."

Mary was so overwhelmed with grief at the sudden death of Mrs. Wareham that she paid little heed to the remainder of the letter. It was two or three days before she fully comprehended that part about the bequest. When she did it was with profound thankfulness. Now she would soon have the means to do all that she wished — to provide a good home for herself and her father. But she resolved not to be impatient; possibly by the next spring this happiness might be hers. She could easily wait that time with such a prospect; yet, as winter advanced, could not help feeling anxious — he was getting to be an old man now. "Suppose he should not live till spring?" — She would not harbor such

fears. No! she was determined to cling to the belief that this absorbing desire of her heart was to be gratified.

Christmas drew near. The usual preparations for the festival were going on at the asylum, and Miss Weston's taste in designing decorations was in great request. Every spare moment for a week had been occupied in this way; and she had interested a number of the patients in the work of twining garlands and wreaths of evergreen for their rooms. The young lady, her especial charge, was much pleased to assist; but was not satisfied with the materials used, wished for something bright and pretty. So troublesome did she become because nothing of the kind had been provided, that Mary brought forward the amaranths she had so lovingly cherished and bade her use them.

Great was the girl's delight. She hugged and kissed the dry flowers, and called them all sorts of pet names, before she untied the ribbon that bound them. After a while she carefully loosened this, and began assorting the blossoms according to their colors. Miss Wes-

ton was glad to see that she did not, as she had first feared, destroy the amaranths. It was a great sacrifice to give her the flowers, but she was thankful that she had made it, when she saw how much good was resulting for her patient.

As the girl went on with her arrangement of the amaranths she threw from among them a folded slip of paper. It fell near Miss Weston's feet. With her usual care she took it up to see what it held. Opening it she read —

"*I am your father's next neighbor, my dear Miss Weston, and I want you to spend Christmas with me. He will be glad to see you.*

"SUSAN GREY."

She looked at the date. It was that of the previous year.

Confused and bewildered, she clutched the precious paper in her trembling hands, and tried to remember how the flowers came into her possession. Going over and over again the events of last year at this time, she could only recollect that she took the bouquet from the waste-barrel. And it was only by mere

accident that she saw them there. Yes; and she remembered too that she then could not account satisfactorily for their appearance.

They were hers. She was sure of that now. And, probably they did come from her old home, and at that time she would have been welcome there. The joy of this thought suffused her face with a warm, bright color, but also sent tears to her eyes, so that her patient supposed her to be sorry — hastily gathered all the amaranths into a cluster and thrust it into her hands.

Selecting a half dozen, Mary fastened them with a few bits of evergreen, and soon convinced the girl that this little bouquet was all she wished to retain; telling her as much of their history as the poor thing could comprehend. The supper bell rang before she had finished the narration. But Mary was glad to hear it; there would be little more required of her for that day, and she was losing her interest in the decorations.

She was too much excited to busy herself about anything just now, and in an abstracted manner attended to the wants of her charge,

who seemed unusually querulous and exacting, till, overpowered by drowsiness, she at last went to bed. Having seen her quietly sleeping Mary had liberty and leisure for calm and deliberate thought. She soon decided that the time had come for her return home. Her father had been ready to welcome her then, when the note was written; it was probable he was still of the same mind.

"If he is living," whispered Doubt.

"He must be. He is;" her heart answered.

Yet it was with great trepidation and anxiety that she began a short letter to Susan Grey, in reply to this long-lost note. She told her how it came into her possession, gave her a brief summary of the changes that had befallen her since that date, and expressed a desire to accept the invitation for the coming Christmas. Before she had finished writing all perturbation had ceased. She was calmly conscious of a great influx of happiness swaying her whole nature.

Once — in a previous age, it seemed, so many and such varying scenes she had passed

through since — on a bright summer day of her girlhood, possessed by a frolicsome spirit of perversity, she had wandered from her companions — had taken a narrow woodland path which the others had shunned.

This path, at first easy and pleasant, led her among brier-bushes and thorny vines; then across a dangerous swamp, darkened by thick, over-hanging trees and infested by reptiles. Treading with uneasy and uncertain steps, she was obliged to go on and on — dared not retrace her course; but at last, she suddenly came to a broad, open plain basking in the sunshine. She remembered distinctly at the present moment the revulsion of feeling caused by the sight of that sunlit plain. That exquisite sensation of restored security and safety was now hers once more.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I'M AFRAID IT'S SO."

MRS. Grey brought from the post-office one morning a letter. "Not from Dan," she said, in reply to Pashie's speaking eyes. But, though she appeared much pleased with its contents, she merely added, "It's a secret, Pinkie, dear, — something nice, that you shall know soon," and folding it carefully laid it away in her desk.

With more than her usual assiduity she went about her daily tasks, alluding often to the nearness of Christmas, and the necessity for having the house in good order and everything ready to pass the day in the pleasantest manner.

Dan was remembered — she sent him a bountiful supply of niceties all ready for his Christmas dinner; and this two days earlier than the last year. Uncle Mark understood that, as usual, he was to dine at Mrs. Grey's on that day.

Patience, with the help of her cane, now went freely about the house; and was in better health than for over a year. She was knitting her present for Uncle Mark — a nice warm scarf. All her other little gifts were finished, and she was hurrying to get this done — so absorbed in the importance of her work that she did not feel the curiosity in her mother's secret which otherwise she might have felt.

For a long time no allusion had been made to Mary Weston. Uncle Mark seemed to avoid everything that might lead to a mention of her name. As time moved on toward Christmas he came oftener to spend his leisure hours in Mrs. Grey's cosy parlor. And she noticed that he seldom left the room without casting his eyes on the picture of Augustine and Monica, sometimes contemplating it sev-

eral minutes. Evidently his absent daughter was often in his thoughts.

He had gathered a quantity of running evergreen and spruce boughs, and had helped the young folks, both at Mrs. White's and Mrs. Grey's, in making a variety of pretty decorations for the windows and walls of several rooms, so that both houses presented a festive appearance in anticipation of Christmas. Mrs. Alison had aided not a little. She had had much practice in such things during her girlhood, under the guidance of "the young ladies at the Hall;" and she twined from spruce and lycopodium and pyrola as tasteful ornaments as she then made from holly and laurel and mistletoe. Wreaths and crosses and stars she made; and letters, too, — which Mrs. White said were good enough for the church, and begged for the adornment of her parlor.

Early on the morning of the day before Christmas Mrs. Grey heard a tap at the street-door.

She started — "somewhat flustered," — she was, as she afterward said, "for it was a very

unusual occurrence at that time of the day;" and hastened to unbolt the door.

Uncle Mark stood there in his Sunday suit. She was just able to distinguish his form and features in the glimmering dawn.

"What — why! Is anything —" she began to say in great anxiety.

He interrupted her nervously — "I'm going in town. Perhaps I'll get back to put up the rest of the trimmings before night. Here's my key — you'd best take care of it. There's so many pickpockets in the city just now. You'll keep it safe, won't you?"

She took the key, but before she could finish her question, or say a word in reply to his request, he was going rapidly down the street.

Trying to collect her thoughts, she looked after him a moment, in amazement.

"To the city!" She had never heard him say that he had been there since his wife's death.

What had occurred to take him there now? Was it anything concerning his sister? Could she be ill or in any trouble?

If so, he surely would have told her; for he had no scruples in talking about her and her interests when occasion required. And he did not seem unhappy. Sober, he was, certainly. But not sad — not as if he were in grief.

Yet it must be something of great importance that could call him there at this time — and so suddenly.

Perhaps, however, the journey was the result of a passing freak. Or Mary may have written him also, she said to herself as she closed the door, and he has gone to accompany her here.

With this conclusion she let the matter drop from her mind, for with the possession of the key came a desire to give Uncle Mark a pleasant surprise.

They had already in place more evergreen trimming than she cared for; the rest, and even some already placed, could be spared. By and by Ellen and herself would decorate the old man's kitchen and Mary's room. "Just a slight expression of our joy at her return," she said. And then revealed to Ellen the secret of Mary's letter.

Ellen soon convinced her that it was not probable that he had gone to meet Mary.

"No, no. Sure, that's not likely at all. Have you forgotten the silver he showed us last week — how full his wallet was? And he, talking of thieves and pick-pockets then, too. It's to the bank — the Savings-bank, no doubt, he's gone — with his money, for safe keeping."

Mrs. Grey remembered that he had received a goodly sum for his last quarter's work at Pleasant Hill; with some display of honest pride had counted it over when he was in one evening, and also had spoken at that time of burglaries that had recently been committed, mentioned too his deposits in a Savings-bank — "that now amounted to something comfortable," he said.

But most of that silver he had spent for winter supplies of fuel and food. There was now not one-third of it left; and — except what little he took this morning for his anticipated expenses, that reposed in an inner drawer of his old secretary, regardless of thieves and robbers.

"No; he had no thought of going to the bank, she felt quite sure, with the small amount he had left after his recent spendings." But she agreed with Ellen that it could not be for anything very unpleasant, and so made haste to carry out her plan for giving a Christmas look to his rooms.

The evening previous Uncle Mark had spent some time at Mrs. Grey's; ending his call with a lively frolic—joining merrily with Trip and the children in their sports. And he had returned home in good spirits. So busy had he been through the day, no time could be spared to read the newspaper. Recollecting this while warming, as he sat by the stove before going to bed, and supposing he should be yet busier on the morrow, he put on his glasses and lighted the little lamp that he liked to read by.

He did not read the paper through. A paragraph on the first page arrested his attention. That he read over and over; and yet again; till every word seemed printed in fiery characters upon his brain. He tried to read other items here and there. But, though he

discerned the words, his mind took no cognizance of them. The paper contained nothing else for him — nothing of the least interest — and at last he laid it aside, that paragraph still haunting him.

He went to bed; but not to sleep. All night long he was haunted by those words.

Toward morning he arose, dressed himself carefully, took a slight breakfast, and, as has been mentioned, went to the city, hurrying to leave on the first inward train.

He could not rest. He must convince himself of the truth or the fallacy of his imaginings evoked by the fearful words of that paragraph.

His old enemy, rheumatism, had given him some tokens of his presence during the past week. But this morning Uncle Mark ignored him entirely, exercising his limbs promptly and firmly, as if no impediment, no infirmity, had ever been his.

He went almost on the run for the last few rods, and puffing vigorously, gained a seat just as conductor Johnson gave the signal for starting. He chose the rear seat, purposely;

and the few passengers in front, just as he wished, took no notice of him. He had reasons for avoiding recognition, and when the train arrived he left as he had entered, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left; and flattered himself that he could proceed on his errand without notice. But, just as he was descending the car-steps, his friend Lancaster left the door of the adjoining car.

"Hillo! Mark, old fellow!" ejaculated Mr. Lancaster, with characteristic cordiality laying his hand on the old man's shoulder." You don't mean to give me the slip? How are you?"

Uncle Mark, in confusion, scowled furiously, and clutched at his hat as if to crowd it over his eyes; but suddenly desisted. "Hadn't any idea of seeing you, Josh," he said.

"What's up?" rejoined Mr. Lancaster. "What brings you to town? Something of importance, I reckon."

"A few errands, one thing and another," was the equivocal reply, in hesitating tones. He scarcely raised his eyes from the ground, but, putting one hand on his friend's arm,

with the other he pulled again at his hat.

They moved on a moment in silence. Then Uncle Mark drew Mr. Lancaster aside from the passing crowd and whispered something that caused his companion to start and gaze fixedly in his face, as if horror-struck.

Again they walked on, the old man muttering something in husky tones.

"It can't be. No, no, Mark, Never! Don't think so," responded his friend, in low, earnest accents. If I were you I'd go right straight back on the next train."

Uncle Mark shook his head. "I haven't come so far to go back without knowing the truth of it. She's a young woman by this time; her hair must be just like that; and—"

"Now, Mark, look here," interrupted Mr. Lancaster. "You just stop where you are. I don't believe a word of it—I won't. And you ought not. It's all—it's altogether too bad" —this in quick, tremulous tones.

"I'm afraid it's so," rejoined Uncle Mark, very sorrowfully. "Perhaps it's well she's at rest. And I shall follow her soon. Ah-h!"

"There, there, old fellow. Do as you think

best. I won't say another word," returned the other, seeing his agitation.

"You see I want to lay her close to Phebe. There's room enough for her and me too up there. When I fixed the place, Phebe, she says — she always had a good look-out for those things, Phebe had — and she says to me, 'Mark,' says she, 'be sure to measure room enough for Mary, in case she should want to be laid alongside of us.' And I did — I made plenty room enough. So I shall have her taken right home and laid there. Poor child! I didn't think *that* was the way she was coming home, when you and I talked it over last year Christmas."

He groaned heavily, still clinging to Mr. Lancaster's arm, and his hat slouched over his eyes. Overcome by his feelings he began to totter.

Mr. Lancaster glanced anxiously at his face. He saw how pinched and haggard his features were. "It is too much for you, Mark," he said tenderly. "You ought not to go alone down there. I wish I could go with you. But I can't, possibly: I engaged to meet

the committee at eight o'clock, and I must hurry right along. — Oh, this is fortunate indeed — just the car to take you straight there!"

A street-car was passing. He saw Uncle Mark safely seated therein, bade him hope for the best, and said he would try to stop for a moment when he passed his cottage in the evening.

Though it was long since Uncle Mark had been in the city, he remembered many of the prominent buildings and knew when he had reached the place of his destination.

A policeman stood at the entrance. He spoke to him. Then, bidding him follow, the man went up a short flight of stairs, through a dim corridor, and up more stairs. Here he unlocked a door and entered — Uncle Mark creeping, rather than walking, after him, — his heart beating so rapidly, his limbs bending under him, his breath thick and fast, he could not control his motions. He sank into the first seat, instinctively turning his back to the room and all it contained.

"'Most too hard — all beat out, ain't you?" said the police, with unusual compassion in his

voice; and then brought him a glass of water.

He took it, acknowledging the kindness with a mournful smile. He moistened his lips, but he could not swallow a drop. He felt as if suffocating, still holding the glass in his trembling hands, his heart beating audibly, his brain in a whirl. The policeman came and sat beside him.

Soon others — men and half-grown boys — shuffled up the stairs, stared a moment at the old man, and then passed on to the centre of the room. The policeman rose to accompany them. Uncle Mark gave him the unused glass of water, and essayed to follow; but, on turning about caught a glimpse of something that made him shudder; and he resumed his seat.

Full fifteen minutes he sat there, several persons passing in and out, meanwhile. At last, making a great effort, he regained composure enough to go forward.

The men, a careless set, who had come in out of idle curiosity, made way for him. They were surrounding something draped with white — *something*, upon which all but the

most hardened look with reverence — *something*, of that peculiar contour which brings thoughts to blanch the cheek of all but the most heedless. Only part of the drapery was raised. But from the face thus disclosed, and the slender outlines of the figure, apparent through the folds of the drapery, it was the form of a young and graceful woman sleeping in death. Many were the conjectures as to her name and her fortunes. Save that she had sinned and suffered, nothing was known.

Uncle Mark, with tightly compressed lips, gazed on the face eagerly for a moment, and stroked tenderly the moist ringlets of fair hair that hung about the broad, open brow and delicate neck. Then he removed rather more of the drapery, and tried to turn back the sleeve from the left arm; his rough, knotty fingers groping pitifully in the task, the policeman assisted him.

"Above the elbow," he said, in a husky whisper. "There — there; that's far enough," he added, in a clearer, firmer voice, as the arm was bared nearly to the shoulder. "No, no. It isn't there — the mulberry isn't there

—no mark at all. Tisn't she. No, no, no!" was his glad cry.

"Your daughter?" queries a man at his side.

"Nobody I ever knew," he answered curtly, and turned hastily away, leaving the room with quick, firm steps.

"Mistrusted 'twas her, anyway," responded his interlocutor, with a disagreeable chuckle, and a nod and a wink to the others.

But Uncle Mark did not hear him—was oblivious to all sights and sounds, just then, —in the great joy of not discovering the birth-mark which was to be the test of the terrible fears that brought him thither.

He passed down stairs and into the street as briskly as a boy. Then mingled with the crowd and walked for a long time. Unused to the streets, he traversed the same over and over again, taking especial notice of a certain bronze statue on one street.

"Up and across and through," he afterward said, "*travelled*—on and on—and see more than half the town. And what in the world they have so many graven

images of that mulatto man for, passes me. More than a dozen of 'em, and every single one alike. A nice, portly sort of a fellow—good-looking man, to be sure, Fred Douglas, or some anti-slavery chap, I suppose. But what's the use? Seems to me there's no need of so many of a sort. And why couldn't they have had a white man amongst 'em? Garrison, or Sumner, or Clay, or even good old Abe Lincoln?"

CHAPTER XV.

"WHAT'S THE MATTER?"

ON the day following her discovery of Mrs. Grey's note Mary Weston gave notice of her intention to leave the asylum. Great regret was expressed by all who heard of it.

"In view of the bequest you will soon receive, we have not expected to retain you much longer," said the superintendent. "While we can but rejoice at your good fortune, the faculty are very sorry to lose so faithful a nurse. It will be difficult to fill your place. We will see what can be done. But you mustn't think of leaving till the first of January."

"Dignified and cold enough," thought Mary. "*Not till January*," she returned. "I cannot

spend Christmas here. Surely there are many wanting employment who might come."

Seeing her distress he promised to use his best endeavors to procure a substitute — if only a temporary one — that she might be released before Christmas; but had great doubts of being successful.

So her bright anticipations were dashed with fears of disappointment. Still, she made all necessary preparations for departure, and with her usual precision and diligence attended to her customary duties.

Day succeeded day. No one had been secured to take her place. At last, at noon of the day previous to Christmas, when she had about given up hope and had begun to accept the inevitable with a forced stoicism, a nurse was procured. With great alacrity she gave her directions in regard to her charge, and then bade a hasty farewell to the friends she had made among the inmates.

Before sunset she was actually crossing the city, and in good season for the next outward train; she had studied the schedule of that route too well lately to make any mistake,

though she had not been over the road for years, and she expected to be at Mrs. Grey's soon after dark.

"No one is happier than I am," she thought, as she looked from the window of the hack, and saw the groups of people bustling along, bearing great bundles and laughing and talking merrily. "And I haven't a single thing for a Christmas gift. Well, I'll make up for it somehow."

Uncle Mark in his walk about the city meeting so many persons with packages and bundles, bethought himself at last of Christmas presents, and turned his attention to the display in the store-windows. After a while he came to a milliner's. Among all the gay bonnets and hats and other finery there spread to view nothing suited him but a lovely head-dress, a conglomeration of foamy lace and lavender ribbons and beautiful pale violets.

"Just the thing! It looks exactly like her, and she shall have it," he whispered to himself; and went in to enquire the price.

It was high — much higher than he expected; but he paid it without demur. He then bought

a pocket handkerchief — "Happy Christmas," in the gaudiest colors embroidered across one corner; and, against the remonstrance of the saleswoman, tucked both headdress and handkerchief into the skirt-pockets of his overcoat.

At a toyshop he bought a huge jumping-jack, a humming-top and a kaleidoscope — with immense satisfaction these last. "Shan't I have music from the youngsters?" he said, with a jolly laugh, as he took the three parcels.

By this time he was hungry, and quite tired; so he dropped into a restaurant, took dinner, and sat — for a few moments, as he supposed — till he felt a little rested. The miserable anxiety of the morning having resulted favorably, he was in a most delightful mood; self-satisfaction, possibly, had something to do with this, for he enjoyed the deference paid him on account of the respectable-looking bundles that he carried so carefully. But, whatever it might be, he felt so comfortable he was in no hurry to go; finally fell asleep — had quite a nap in his chair — to the no small amusement of the waiters and the strangers around him.

He slept soundly and awoke refreshed. He

had lost nearly two hours, but was not aware of it. Gathering up his bundles he stepped to the desk and paid for his dinner. While waiting for the change due he saw a dish of cream-cakes on the adjoining counter. "Nice-looking doughnuts," he said. "I'll have a couple." Then — "A couple more;" and stowed them in his overcoat pockets, forgetful of what said pockets already held.

Paying for these confused him, and somewhat disarranged his calculations. Endeavoring mentally to square his accounts, he walked out of the restaurant empty-handed — thought no more of his bundles till he so nearly reached home as to see the light in Mrs. Grey's window. While buying his homeward ticket two of his neighbors came along, talking loudly of the burglaries committed that day in a neighboring town; and he continued in conversation with them on that and similar subjects all the way from the city; indeed, afterward also, until they parted at Thornton's corner, half-way up the street; the light from that window streamed merrily down the street. He saw it, and exclaimed, as with a sudden shock from his delin-

quent memory — "Pinkie's present! I never! And Tommy's! and the baby's!" Bringing his hands together with a loud clap as he spoke, he then turned, and retraced a few steps.

But he soon changed his mind, and again trudged toward home.

"No, no. It's no use. They're gone — sure. Eheu! Well, that's my luck — spilt milk, and no good crying over it. Might as well get home and tell what a stupid old owl I've been. Somebody's young ones will get the benefit of the playthings, I hope. Mighty bright light seems to me. And Pashie's singing. No, she isn't, either. Pretty lively talk, though. Ellen's got a pleasanter voice than I ever thought she had."

He gave a loud rap at the door.

Mrs. Grey opened it immediately.

"My key," he said. "I'll take it — can't stop to come in now."

"Oh you must, you must," she replied, grasping both his hands and attempting to draw him forward.

"Not now. By and by; perhaps —"

"Yes, yes, *now*," she persisted, in such a sober, almost solemn voice, that he asked, "What — WHAT'S THE MATTER?" and suffered her to lead him in.

Not a sound was heard. The house seemed filled with brightness and a rapturous silence. Uncle Mark was just conscious of Ellen — Mrs. Alison — standing, with her little girl in her arms, who threw him kisses continually; of Tommy by great effort preventing Trip's noisy welcome; and Patience, with clasped hands, gazing earnestly at a tall, pale lady who came to meet him.

He could not mistake the poise of the head, nor the light, quick step, There was no need even of the word "Father," uttered so beseechingly that tears came to the eyes of Mrs. Grey and Ellen.

She cast a timid glance — love, remorse, entreaty, hope looked from the drooping lids — she dared not meet his full gaze — as she extended her hand. He seized it — held it in a firm, warm grasp, and instantly her head was on his shoulder and both sobbing audibly.

"Merry Christmas! A Merry Christmas!"

shouted Tommy, who could see no cause for sobbing.

"Ay, ay! so it is," said Uncle Mark, quickly regaining composure, and taking off his hat."

"The happiest of my life," said Mary, dashing away her tears, and assisting him to divest himself of his overcoat. But her voice trembled and her full blue eyes were heavy with the tears that could not be repressed — again and again her hand furtively swept them away.

"Such an old bungler as I am," he said, at one sleeve resisted his attempts at removal. "Nothing but blunders and mistakes, always. Eheu!"

"Don't say that, father," she rejoined with a gay little laugh. "I have come for you to help me correct my mistakes."

"Come for a happy Christmas," said Patience. "Now isn't it so, uncle?"

"Yes, yes, Pinkie. Now she's here — it's all complete — we don't want anything more for Christmas. But I did have some gimcracks for you and the children; they're gone, though."

Here he told of his walks through the city

streets, of the stores, and his purchases. Then he began fumbling in his coat-pockets.

"I guess I'd better give you you're cap now," Mrs. Grey—just a little trifle for Christmas that took my eye. My sakes! I never!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Those doughnuts weren't half-baked; they weren't of course," and with dripping fingers he held up an unsightly mess of crushed cream-cakes, lace and lavender ribbons.

This, with his look of amazement and disgust, was irresistible. Tommy and Patience shouted and screamed with delight; the baby joining, and Trip also, in chorus with the less boisterous laughter of their elders. It was too comical even for Mrs. Grey's usual gravity.

"I suppose your handkerchief's just as bad, Ellen," he continued, rummaging the other pocket, with a like result; and, the merriment increasing, he laughed and wheezed also till nearly black in the face.

"What a pity," said Mary, trying to rescue a few of the ribbons and flowers from farther injury.

"Rather costly sport," remarked Uncle Mark

good-naturedly. "Pretty good joke, though. Not a single present after all. Dear — dear! What a foolish day I've had! It makes me sick at my stomach to think I'd be such a simpleton. Never ought to have stirred a step. Wish I'd minded Josh and came right back; Lancaster knows what's what."

Mrs. Gray had heard some one at the door, and just as he stopped talking came in with a gentleman.

"Didn't I hear my name mentioned? What were you saying against me?" he asked jocosely.

Mrs. Grey had told him of Mary's arrival, and he had greeted her kindly before Uncle Mark was aware of his presence.

"Bless your heart! I never had anything against you, Lancaster, in all my born days. Don't you see?"

Here he held up the handkerchief and a crushed and dripping cake.

"Don't you see? My ventures haven't turned out very fortunate to-day, and —"

"I should think they had, uncommonly for-

tunate, interposed Mr. Lancaster, with a bow and a smile toward Mary.

"Well, Josh, I wish I'd come right back again; or not stirred a step in the first place."

He tried to scowl, but under his annoyance there was so much pride and happiness that his face fairly shone with delight — the combined expressions giving him such a queer aspect that another burst of merriment arose, Mr. Lancaster adding his quota thereto.

"I'll make an end of it all," he continued, opening the stove-door and thrusting all he held upon the blazing coals; then, against Mrs. Grey's vehement remonstrance, gathered the remainder — cakes, cream, and ruined head-dress — even the few ribbons that Mary had removed — into one great handful, and threw that also upon the fire.

"The idea!" he exclaimed. "Making such a job for you, Mrs. Grey."

But Mary was already removing every trace of the accident. Without a word, Mrs. Alison had brought washbasin, water and sponge, and Mary's nimble fingers quickly appropriated and utilized them — so effectually, that table and

carpet, as well as overcoat — were pronounced all right in less than five minutes.

Mr. Lancaster's sleigh was waiting. He had no time to spare. He just wished them all a happy Christmas — tarried an instant till Mary was at liberty to return his parting handshake — with congratulations on her return; and, clapping Uncle Mark on the shoulder, said with a knowing look:

"All's well that ends well, old fellow," and was off.

Uncle Mark was impatient to know how Mary happened to be here just at this time.

As briefly as possible she told in what manner she obtained possession of the amaranths, how recently she discovered Mrs. Grey's last year's invitation, and her great desire to avail herself of it; and her note to Mrs. Grey expressing that desire.

The small bouquet that she had kept from those amaranths she now wore at the fastening of her collar.

"So it was the amaranths — just as Ellen said it would be!" cried Patience.

"That's so; you are right, Pashie," said

Uncle Mark. "They always made me think of Mary. And when I gave them to you I knew they ought to go to her — only my pride kept me from saying so. A–h–h! how that foolish pride does blind us, sometimes. And how much unhappiness it piles up for us. But it's all gone now. It's all gone, Mary; and all the whole earth seems bright and handsome to-night."

"It's because of the light that shines in your own heart," said Ellen. "There's nothing to give such a glory to the very darkest spot, as the blessed sunbeams of love, when there's nothing to bar them."

"True enough," said Mrs. Grey. "And if our heavenly Father can forgive our many misdeeds, we ought to find it easy to forgive our fellow-men. Our love must be weak indeed if we let pride and impatience interfere with what ought to be considered a privilege, rather than a duty."

"It seems to me," said Mary Weston modestly, "that the enjoyment of Christmas is made much greater when we can say conscien-

tiously that we are striving to live in brotherly kindness with every one."

"It cuts across the grain, sometimes, to do that, daughter. And we are pretty apt to draw the line rather tight when it comes to obliging those who have done us — well, no good," said Uncle Mark.

"But we can make the attempt," suggested Mrs. Grey. "And the very desire to do so gives a good start. If we would only remember that! And remember, too, that unless we have that brotherly love — the charity that suffereth long and is kind — kind, still, in spite of suffering, we are nothing."

Mary was greatly surprised to hear that her father expected her to go home with him. She had understood that the invitation to spend Christmas was from Mrs. Gray, and supposed that during a visit to her she must repeat the plea urged in that letter, so long ago. She was overjoyed to have him say that "she belonged to him — of course she would go with him — he couldn't spare her to anybody else."

Two hours were passed in pleasant conversation. There was much to be explained, and

many questions were asked. Yet even then not half the story of those years of separation was told. But the children were sleepy — it was getting late; and, promising to come in early the next day, both father and daughter bade their kind neighbors good-night.

That was a joyful moment to Mary Weston when she entered her father's door; though many sad memories were awakened as her eye fell on familiar objects. The quiet that pervaded the house had an air of solemnity for her, and in low, serious tones she talked over the years of her childhood, and asked many questions concerning the last days of her mother's life. Long into the night they sat and talked — she and her father — the bell of the neighboring church ringing at intervals its chime — "Peace-and-good-will, Peace-and-good-will."

She found her own little room exactly as she left it, so many years ago; and she shed many tears at the traces of loving care in the yet snow-white curtains and counterpane, the still handsome carpet and bright picture-frames, the furniture and books, as good and as nice

as when new. The years of her absence seemed but a dream. She could scarcely realize that she was not now a child. With a heart filled with tender recollections of the past and high resolves for the future, she laid her head at last upon the pillow and slept soundly. But she woke very early, as she had hoped. It was scarcely daylight when she began anew the old home-life:

CHAPTER XVI.

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS.

UP with the first sunbeam was Uncle Mark the next morning, and with childish glee he shouted a Merry Christmas at the door of Mary's room. Her answer came from the kitchen, where she had been an hour. Without disturbing her father's slumbers, she had managed to make the fire and get a nice breakfast long before he was ready for it; and had given a more comely look to the low-walled kitchen and its meager display of housekeeping. She was pleased to see the green wreaths which Mrs. Grey and Ellen had hastily placed over the doors and at the windows the day before. As her father came in, she was placing her

bouquet of amaranths in front of his plate upon the well-ordered table.

"Merry, merry Christmas! Sure enough, child," he said watching her movements. "And just hear the tea-kettle! Singing like Herbert Thornton's young black-birds. And the coffee boiling — brisk enough to set the whole house a-riding. Well, you're not spoilt for house-work. I did'nt mean it, though."

"Didn't mean what, father?" she asked, arranging his chair.

"Didn't mean you should make fires, and such things — not this first day, anyhow."

"O yes, yes. I wanted to begin at the beginning. Come and try my cookery. I have my fears about the coffee, I must confess," she said, as they seated themselves — Mary at the head of the table.

"You're your mother's own child, dimples, and dent, and all," he said. "It seems as if our little Mary couldn't be grown to such a tall young woman."

The tears gathered in Mary's eyes at the allusion to her mother, but she went on with the duties of her position with tolera-

ble composure. Her father, noticing her silence, as she passed his toast, looked up and saw her troubled face. "I'm a stupid old goose," he said—"ought to have known better. Don't, don't cry. I won't say another word."

"I cry? No, not today," was her reply. And then she began to talk about going to church.

With very little demur he agreed to accompany her, and hastened to accomplish his usual morning duties that he might be ready in time. And very pleasant he found it to walk to church leaning on his daughter's arm, pleasant too to meet the smiling welcome of everybody's face. But, pleasanter far, to hear his daughter's voice in the hymns while she held the same book with himself. And, pleasanter still, after church, to receive the congratulations of the minister and his wife. Then Mr. White and his wife came to give Mary a kind greeting; and Mrs. Grey stepped forward to accompany them to the dinner, that she felt certain was getting cold, waiting for their arrival.

Patience, with Trip at her side, stationed at the window, gave Ellen notice of their first appearance; and Tommy, Trip now at his heels and barking delightedly, bounced out to open the door.

Never was there a happier party than that now gathered around Mrs. Grey's table. She silently contrasted it with that of last Christmas. She would have been glad to see Dan here. But she was content. One of his bright, happy letters had arrived this very morning. He was well and perfectly satisfied with his lot. That was enough. And the letter contained the whole of his last week's earnings, as a present to her and Pashie; and told of the great delight her "Christmas fixins" and good letter had given him.

Before dinner was over the express brought a package — "For Miss Weston."

She colored when she saw the handwriting on the wrapper. It had been sent to the asylum and forwarded thence. She opened it very deliberately, knowing well what the sending of the gift meant, and troubled to feel obliged to receive it.

It was a beautiful engraving. The little company were all interested to see the picture, and her father questioned her very closely about it. She could not go into details, but said enough to assure them that it had not added to her enjoyment of the day. And yet she could not keep the giver from her thoughts. It was such a pity that he had not seen long ago, *would not see*, she began to think, that she did not, and never could care for him in the way that he wished and hoped.

Mary was not particularly fond of children — had seldom been in their company, except by way of charity. She was interested in the Crowleys it is true, and intended, as soon as she had the means, to put Barbara in the way of going to school. As yet she had taken little notice of the children here; had spoken gently to Patience, and asked about her lameness, and smiled very sweetly upon her often. But that was all. When she saw how attentive her father was to them all, and how eager Tommy and little Mary were to attract her father's notice and to draw him into a frolic, she became interested enough to join in the sport.

In fact the whole company were in such exuberant spirits they were all children together, and for over an hour amused themselves with Christmas games. Ellen, joined in as gaily as any, and introduced some new features borrowed from her recollections of similar sports in her childhood's home.

After that at her father's request Mary sang some of the songs that he had heard her sing when a girl; and Patience was in ecstacies, for more, and yet one more, till her mother was obliged to chide her for such unusual rudeness. The day closed by all singing in concert Uncle Mark's favorite — "While shepherds watched their flocks by night."

"Aren't you going to have your smoke, Uncle Mark?" said Mrs Grey.

"No," said he, "I nearly smoked Mary out of the house this morning, and concluded it was time for the old pipe to go. So I threw it away for good."

Seeing that the filthy habit was distasteful to Mary he resolved to leave it off for her sake, though he had a severe battle with his long indulged appetite.

Before Mary Weston retired for the night, in the silence of her little room, she sat long and thought. She felt that she must take a decisive step, painful as it might be to some others, and disagreeable to herself. And a long letter was written and sealed. It was addressed to Mrs. Fay, but intended "for both sisters," so she wrote. It would have been the same had she not so written, for Mrs. Bond was as her sister's other self, and consulted and confided in implicitly.

She told them of her return to her father; of her determination to devote the remainder of her life to him; of the quiet manner in which for the future her life must be passed; of the pleasure she expected to find in this quietness, and of her satisfaction in being able to promote thus her father's happiness, mentioning that probably she should soon have the means to provide him a more comfortable home than he had ever known. She sent her regards to Isaac, thanked him for the fine engraving he had sent her, but begged them to tell him that she needed no farther tokens of his friendship.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AMARANTHS IN BLOOM.

THE gossips, who had had plenty of amusement for several years in their conjectures and surmisings over Uncle Mark Weston's loneliness and Mary's absence, now speculated much in regard to her return. A new edition of her story — I wish I could say "revised and improved" — circulated through the village before she had been home a week. Still, I must do most of them the justice to state that they were sincerely glad of her return, for her father's sake.

Mary kept on cheerfully in her new course of life, determined that her father's welfare should be paramount to all other considerations,

and that he should neither hear nor see anything that seemed like discontent. It was truly a severe discipline, but she made no complaints. She had many disagreeable and difficult duties to perform, for she knew little of housekeeping; yet shrank from nothing, not even the most menial. But the most annoying, the most painful things that she had to encounter were those over which she had no control — chilling manners, contemptuous looks, and not unfrequently, rude speeches — slyly uttered, perhaps, but nevertheless, intended to reach her ears.

Mrs. Grey and Patience she soon became very fond of; and Mrs. Alison she liked also, appealing often to her strong common sense in matters of doubt. Mrs. White was extremely kind; she appreciated the kindness, but did not feel drawn towards her as to those others.

In January came a letter from Mr. Wareham, under cover from the asylum, stating that the settlement of his mother's estate was progressing; by spring he hoped to be able to place her portion at her own disposal. Consulting

with Mrs. Grey, Mary decided to say nothing of the bequest until near the time that she might reasonably expect it; the anticipation might excite her father, or make him unnecessarily anxious. With what she had saved from her earnings, and Mr. Wareham's gift — kept sacredly for this very purpose — she had more than sufficient to liquidate her expenses for a number of months. Her father strenuously opposed even the mention of such measures, saying he had enough, and more than enough for both.

It seemed as if he could not find satisfactory ways to show his love, and was only too happy to provide her some delicacy, or to prepare her some pleasant surprise, at the cost of his own hard labor, or by deprivation of his own comfort.

At first Mary was pained to see this; but she found it was best to indulge him — he would not bear contradiction on these points, and by and by she could amply compensate for it all.

Each thus emulating the other in such good works, their days were filled with a quiet hap-

piness. They often acknowledged it the most blessed period of their lives.

Spring was at last fairly established. Patience faltered again, suffered much from the old pain in her side; and still one shoulder was much higher than the other, she found, even in Mary Weston's beautiful mirror, which she allowed her to look in whenever she felt well enough to come and spend an afternoon. But Dr. Mullins was sanguine of her recovery, and tried several remedies; thus keeping them all hopeful.

Mary Weston had consulted him in regard to her father's health, for he seemed getting feeble as spring opened. He was losing his interest in ordinary matters, and did not care to frolic with the children; nor even to wheel Patience as he used. There were days when he cared only to sit in the sunshine and watch the springing grass and bursting buds. Dr. Mullins prescribed a simple tonic, said he would gain strength with the advancing season. She felt that a great change was taking place; whether mental or physical, or both she could not determine. Yet he would go on

with his work at the Hill; "must putter round some, to straighten out the kinks," he told Mrs. White.

One bright afternoon Mary was greatly surprised to see Mrs. Bond and Isaac Fay coming up the street. For a moment her heart beat rapidly and her cheeks flushed. But by the time she opened the door she was pale and calm. She tried to be cordial, but really did not feel so. Yet, according to Mrs. Bond's version to Mrs. Fay, she succeeded. Isaac could not determine whether she was glad to see them or not.

For himself the mere sight of her face was intense delight; and while he stayed he made the most of that, to poor Mary's great confusion — especially when her father was present. Uncle Mark went in and out, in a sort of pre-occupied manner, during the call; but said very little to the strangers. He saw enough, however, to speak of the young man afterward to Mary.

"He had business in the neighborhood," was her reply; "and his aunt thought it a good opportunity to come and see if I were well."

"Humph!" responded he. "He'll have business often in the neighborhood now, I suppose."

She understood him. "Nothing that will interest me," she said quietly. "They were very kind to me when I was nearly friendless, father, and I shall always regard them very highly."

"The young man won't let matters rest so, daughter. He won't. He knows how to manage a stroke of business in any line — anybody can see that in his mouth and chin — nature's left pretty plain signs there."

Mary blushed, began to speak, but hesitated an instant. Then she said — "I shall never leave you, father."

"He might expect he could come here" — there was a quiver in the old man's voice.

"No one shall come between you and me," she interposed quickly.

And that was the last of the disagreeable subject. Neither made allusion to it again.

Gardening time came. Uncle Mark planted amaranth seed, with more than usual concern, in the corner which Mr. White had allowed

him to appropriate for his own use. The early vegetables were up, and the spring flowers in bloom. The most trying part of the season was over, and Patience certainly no worse than last year at this time. Dan had written that he was coming home to spend a week soon, and would like to help Uncle Mark in the garden — was sorry to hear that he was not as strong and well as usual.

They were all looking forward to Dan's visit with great pleasure when Uncle Mark was suddenly taken ill. "Palsy," the doctor pronounced it. Mrs. Alison summoned him, speaking wildly of his heavy fall and the stupor that had followed it. For several days he remained in a semi-conscious state, speech and motion suspended. But these faculties were gradually restored; and great was Mary's joy to hear him call her name once more, to get about the house as usual.

At length he was able to go out-of-doors, to walk "as far as the squire's," he thought, with Mary's help. She tenderly supported his bent and tottering figure; and thus they reached the garden gate. Something of his old

enthusiasm seemed then to return. He looked, with a pleased and peaceful expression upon his pale, furrowed face, over the shrubbery and flowers he had trained and trimmed so many years; cast his eyes beyond them to the orchard, thrifty and flourishing; and again at the fields, stretching down to the river's brink with their verdant promise of plenty.

Mary spoke in rapturous terms of the lovely scene thus spread out before them, and of the abundant harvest it must hold in preparation.

"Yes yes; the squire'll do well here, I guess. Things are turning out better than common," he answered. "It's a wonderful good year. Well, I'm glad, he'll make a good use of it. But, my girl, our amaralds are better than all."

"Well, they are flourishing, I see. Come nearer, and look at them, father. The blossoms are beginning to peep out already."

She led him to his flower-bed. The amaranths were holding up their purple buds, as if in welcome to him who appreciated their beauty and its lessons so well.

Mrs. White had seen Mary and her father approaching, and came to beg them to go to the house and rest, and take some refreshment.

But Uncle Mark was unwilling — he wished to stay among his flowers. So Alice and Edith brought out a large easy chair, and then cake and fruit. There was much lively talk about the garden, and then Mary gathered a handful of flowers for Patience. The girls, also, from their own choicest blossoms, made her a bouquet.

"O, those ain't worth much — fading so quick," said Uncle Mark. "I like things that are more lasting. There are the amaralds — a great sight better, to my thinking."

"Yours are growing finely," said Mrs. White. "You'll have a quantity to gather by and by."

"Ah, well; yes, I hope so. But, you know I planted some one winter." He lowered his voice, as if he intended these last words for her ear only.

"You have never been sorry you planted those, I know," was her reply in the same

subdued tones. "They have borne fine blossoms. You have been well repaid, I think."

"Haven't I, though?" In his eagerness he forgot his cautious tones, there was a glad ring in his accents, and a bright smile illuminated his rugged face. "Where should I be now if it wasn't for Mary? Bless her heart! nobody knows how kind she's been, and good, too. Since I've been poorly she can't do enough. And some of the neighbors, too grand to pass the time of day with her! Mighty hard that is, I can see; though she don't complain — not a word."

Mrs. White saw that these allusions annoyed Mary, so she began to talk about Dan Grey. "His mother is looking for him soon, I believe," she said.

"Yes. And there's Ralph, Mrs. White. He ought to come here, too. Mines are unhealthy, terribly bad for rheumatism. He'd get rid of it in the clear, dry air here, among the trees."

Some one rode rapidly up the carriage entrance.

"What's that, Mary? A boy on horseback,

wasn't it? What's up now, I wonder — driving like Gilpin — 'neck or nought'?"

Alice, who had rushed to meet the rider, now ran up to her mother, a buff envelope in her hand.

"A telegraph!" exclaimed Uncle Mark. "I thought I knew that horse. Eheu!"

"There is no great harm, nothing serious," said Mrs. White; who, with agitation, had torn open the envelope. "It's from Dan Grey. 'There's been an explosion. Ralph is slightly injured in the head — can't be properly cared for there. An immediate answer is required.' And Mr. White is in town. I really don't know what to do."

"Remember the amaralds — think what they've done for me," suggested Uncle Mark.

"I do, I do;" replied she. "But I must consult my husband in this matter."

"Perhaps he'd be glad to have the business taken out of his hands."

"I can't be the one to take that responsibility."

So no telegram was returned — no answer sent.

Mrs. White passed into the house to tell her daughters the news, and Mary felt that it was time for her father to go home.

He begged her to pluck a few of the half-developed amaranths — "Just to keep by me — I forget so quickly," he said. She took half-a-dozen, tied them with a blade of ribbon-grass into a compact little bouquet for the button hole of his coat, and, laughing gayly at their stiff, harsh texture, fastened them securely in place.

"Stiff?" said her father, with mild reproach — "harsh? They've smoothed the roughest path I ever trod; and made my hardest duties easy?"

They walked slowly homeward, talking pitifully of Ralph White — though censuring him not a little. Just as they gained their own door Mary saw the same messenger that had been at Pleasant Hill stop at Mrs. Gray's.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. GREY'S DOCTRINE.

HAVING seen her father somewhat rested, and comfortably arranged for a nap, Mary Weston hurried in to Mrs. Grey's to know if she had heard anything additional to what Dan had sent Mr. White.

"There's been an explosion — from careless management with cartridges," said Mrs. Grey. "Dan is safe. But Ralph White is injured! and Dan will bring him here to-night. They will arrive on the midnight train."

"Mrs. Grey! Why, you can't attend to him!"

"Why not? I am so thankful that my boy is not hurt I'll do anything. I'm sure he can

have Dan's room; and Dan will be here to wait on him and to help nurse him."

"And here's the others; and Pinkie so miser —"

"Oh! I'm well enough," interrupted Patience. "That is, well enough to take care of myself most of the time."

"Yes. Pinkie needs very little attention now," said her mother. "I can manage the care of the sick man very well. I am glad Dan is to be here with him, though."

"I am at your service, any time, if I can be any help. But I am afraid you are attempting too much," said Mary.

Ellen came forward to say that she would mind the housekeeping and keep up with the sewing, so that Mrs. Grey could have all her time for the sick man.

"But his brother. What will the squire say?" asked Mary.

"I don't trouble myself about that," Mrs. Grey replied. "Dan knows that something must be done immediately; and, in the emergency, he has certainly been wiser to decide to bring him here than to send him to Pleas-

ant Hill. They are friends — Dan and Ralph — and Dan probably intends to do all the nursing. I shall have a word to say about that, though. He shan't lose all the recreation he was expecting from his visit. But I must be arranging the room, and you can help me there, Mary."

The two women went up to the attic chamber that Mrs. Grey called Dan's room. Though the ceiling at one side sloped nearly to the floor, and there was but one window and a skylight to give sunshine and air, it was very pleasant. The room was neatly furnished — everything looked thoroughly clean and cool and comfortable.

After moving the bed to a more airy location, getting fresh sheets and pillow-slips and towels, Mrs. Grey began to collect what articles were likely to be needed for the sick man; that all should be handy and convenient on his arrival.

Mary, finding that in these matters she could be of no use, took a chair beside the window. From this a fine view was afforded: the broad level meadows in their rich sum-

mer verdure; the blue river, with pretty arched bridge; the undulating grounds beyond, dotted with substantial farm-houses; and then the belt of pines; and the mountains yet farther in the distance — their outlines now blending with a few fleecy clouds. Her eyes were upon the landscape, but her thoughts were not there, for, after a moment, she said in very deliberate tones —

"Mrs. Grey do you know what a life Ralph White has led?"

"Your father has told me a good deal about him."

"Do you think he is a suitable companion for your son?"

"He is not really his companion. Dan has been led to treat him kindly out of pity. But my boy's principles are too firmly fixed to be affected by intercourse with him. And Ralph has seen the folly — the errors — of his early life. I know from what Dan says of him in his letters that he is doing very differently now — is thoroughly repentant; and, in his poverty and ill health, is particularly susceptible to kind and tender influences."

"'Better keep him so — keep him as he is —' the squire has said to those who have spoken of his sickness at the mines. He thinks that with a full pocket and good health he'd be as wild as ever."

"That is not my doctrine. Give him the credit of all that is right in his conduct; and surround him with good influences; set consistent Christian examples before him; fill his life with good honest cheerfulness, *then* we shall have done our duty toward him — not before. We often commit great sin in leaving undone those things which we ought to do."

"I suppose you are right, Mrs. Grey. But I don't believe I could ever have the charity for him that you are ready to show," was Mary's respone.

"'Tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you,'" said Mrs. Grey. "That is all — *even as*. The likeness must be very faint in our best attempts. But it is a comfort to know that it is a likeness, though faint and dim. And you will find it so."

Mary Weston pondered long on what Mrs.

Grey had said. This then was the secret of that good woman's life — her cheerful, hopeful, unselfish life; a life of forbearance and patience — "*even as.*" The words haunted her many a day, and unconsciously moulded themselves into kind and hopeful and patient thoughts and deeds.

When, at midnight, the shrill whistle of the advancing train echoed through the darkness, a low, easy hack went hurrying to the station — sent thither by Mrs. Grey, thoughtful of all the details of comfort; and in this Dan and the wounded man were carefully conveyed to her door.

Ralph's wounds, though not dangerous, were of a serious nature; for the brain was somewhat affected, and the surgeon who had been called in, prescribed perfect rest and quiet for some days. This he could not have in his lodging-house. Hence the arrangement that Dan had made. And Dan knew his mother too well to have any doubts of a kind reception.

The wounded man was perfectly quiescent. In fact he appeared so stunned, or shocked, by

the catastrophe, as to be incapable of thought in the matter. He had lain quite still — had scarcely spoken since the accident — only roused enough to look about him as he was brought in and carried up-stairs. Then his eyes closed again.

Dan spoke in subdued, gentle tones. But whenever Ralph heard his voice he opened his eyes and followed every movement of the lad wistfully.

There was little to be done. But Dan sat at the bedside the remainder of the night, giving slight refreshment occasionally, or wetting the bandages on the poor bruised head. Toward morning Ralph fell into a doze. Then Mrs. Grey took her son's place; and bade him go to the adjoining chamber and endeavor to rest — he was looking so haggard and careworn — or he would be ill himself.

Mr. William White, the squire, had business that called him to the city on the early train. He was so prompt that he was obliged to wait a few minutes, until the cars were in running order. As he paced the platform impatiently his attention was attracted to a group of men,

employes on the road. They were in earnest conversation, and he heard the words:

"Yes. Dan Grey and a man. Got hurt in the head."

Something followed this — a question, probably, for there came next — "White, brother to the squire. Spalding took them both to the widow Grey's."

The cars were on the track; waiting now, for passengers. Everybody was hurrying in — everybody but Mr. White. He suddenly decided not to go in town so early, and retraced his steps homeward.

Mrs. White was surprised to see her husband coming back, and ran to the door to meet him, alarm in her face.

He told her what he had heard, and that he must know the truth of it. If it were really so, Ralph must not stay there.

"I've done enough for him, you know; and he has tried me beyond endurance, time and again," he said. "But this is more aggravating than all. He shall not be beholden to Mrs. Grey. He must come here immediately. Can you find room for him?"

Mrs. White was all alacrity.

"O yes. It won't take long to make up a bed. I'll send Bridget about it. He can come in an hour."

"I must hunt up a nurse for the good-for-nothing, I suppose," rejoined this irate brother.

"No, no. I'll look after him. We'll manage that between us, easily enough, I guess."

Now that she felt at liberty to exercise the compassion that had long filled her heart, there was really danger that Mrs. White would overdo the matter. She went herself and made all things ready for his coming — providing much more for the comfort of her expected charge than her husband had any idea would be necessary.

On calling at Mrs. Grey's Mr. White found that she considered his brother too ill to be moved. He did not ask to see Ralph, but on receiving that answer, said he would send in a physician and abide by his advice.

Dr. Mullins came. He agreed with Mrs. Grey that Ralph should remain with her for the present.

For more than a week the squire called

every day to see about the removal of his sick brother; but during that time never went to his chamber — said expressly he did not wish to see him.

When Ralph had so far recovered as to sit up in bed and converse a little the doctor was willing he should go to Pleasant Hill. His patient was loth to go. He had been so kindly treated at Mrs. Grey's he begged piteously to be allowed to remain till he could go out-doors; "Then he would go back to the mines. There he could do odd chores; if nothing more, enough to earn the small expense of his living."

But the squire was inflexible. He must go to Pleasant Hill.

To make the matter easier Dan promised to go with him, and spend the first day. And when the carriage came to convey him thither, with plenty of soft robes and pillows — at Mrs. White's suggestion, indeed of her own arrangement, these last — Dan made a sort of jubilee of the occasion, with his ridiculous assumption of authority over all the proceedings, and in taking Patience along with them. Her singing in the room below had cheered the sick man

many a dull and heavy hour; and it was a great pleasure now to look on her demure little figure, with the great speaking eyes turned pityingly upon him, and the flushes coming and going in her thin cheeks at every sound of his voice.

Mrs. White was gentleness itself. Dan thought he had never seen her so lovable; and next to his mother, he had always considered her the loveliest woman in the world. But Alice and Edith seemed shy and frightened. They were all three awaiting Ralph in the chamber assigned him.

Mr. White was in town, would not return till late. He did, however, arrive before Dan left. There was an air of restraint in his salutations, both to him and to Ralph, that Dan did not like — something he had never seen before. "He used to be so free and friendly with me," was the lad's thought. Seeing this he did not wonder at Ralph's unwillingness to come. And when he marked the coldness of his manner in making enquiries of that sick brother he was almost constrained to stay and bear with him the unfeeling indifference. He

soon found that he was expected to go, and of course Patience went with him. Ralph looked distressed at their leaving, but expressed no regret in words.

Dan was not to be absent long. Late at night a messenger came for him. Ralph was much worse — delirious; and Mr. White needed his help to calm and control him. At the first sound of Dan's voice Ralph's excitement subsided; he soon became calm and submissive as a child to all his requirements. There was no farther trouble. By daylight it was decided that the lad should remain with him till his recovery.

Dan never knew what had occurred in his absence, nor what had caused the delirium. But there was a great change from that time forward in the squire's manner both toward him and toward Ralph. He was eager to do whatever he advised for the ease or for the improvement of the sick one; and performed many little services patiently and kindly; learning of Dan to nurse him carefully.

"You must be a born nurse," he said, one day. "You know just how to suit Ralph in

everything. I wish I could learn the art—wish I had your way of managing him."

"There is no art about it," replied Dan. "One should be calm and quiet; indulgent in little, trivial things, though firm in all important matters, I find, be they never so small."

"I try to be, and to do, the same. There must be something else."

"I don't know of anything else. Except it is, perhaps, because I believe he will do just as I wish, and he feels that I have full confidence in him."

It was just this, and nothing more, as Mr. White soon learned. And after Ralph was restored to comfortable health he came to the conclusion that if he had known Dan's way, years before, and practised it, both he and Ralph might have been spared a great deal of unhappiness.

Summer's beauty was on the wane before Ralph was well enough to leave the house; and not until then did Dan return to the mines. At the urgent solicitation, both of Ralph and his brother, he had remained from week to week. When not in attendance

upon Ralph — for, as he gained strength, this was not so essential as at first — making himself useful in the garden; and before he did go Ralph had begun to do a little work there himself.

Patience remained about the same, suffering much at times; for the doctor continued his painful remedies. But her mother spoke courageously — bade her be patient a little longer yet. And she tried very hard to be patient, — made few complaints. Mary Weston had taught her several kinds of fancy-work that served to while away the hours, frequently so tedious; and sometimes the carriage from Pleasant Hill, taking out the invalid uncle, called and gave her too a ride, which she enjoyed immensely — especially if Alice or Edith had leave from their father to squeeze themselves into a vacant corner of the vehicle.

One day, late in August, Uncle Mark had another stroke of paralysis — a very severe one. Never was daughter more devoted than Mary Weston. His slightest wants were anticipated, and supplied with the greatest alacrity. He soon became entirely helpless. Some-

times she wondered if he would live many years, as she had heard some did, thus dependant upon others. But not for herself did this thought trouble her. She was strong and well, she had been sustained thus far, and she would not doubt or fear for the future.

About this time a letter from Mr. Wareham, enclosing a check for a portion of her legacy, gave her much pleasure. It was a sum much larger than she had expected — equal to what she had hoped the whole bequest might be. Now she was able to procure assistance in her house-keeping, and could speak of her good fortune to her father.

It was long before she could convince him that the money was a free gift — that nothing was expected in return; above all to make him feel assured that she need not leave him — that she never would leave him. He was getting childish and forgetful, and needed this assurance frequently. Though helpless he was in many respects quite comfortable, and enjoyed society; and wished often to be taken to the door to watch the

children when they were at play under the elm.

He had heard with great surprise of the squire's kindness of Ralph; and once when his neighbor, Mr. Thornton, was in, talked over Ralph's roving life, and begged Mr. Thornton to look after the young man and give him advice for his future course.

Ralph himself came one day, and told him how kind his brother was; and said that he meant to repay him well yet. "Just let me get my health sir, and he shall know, and others too, what I can do, and that I know how to be grateful. And I shall begin with the garden — have done a few jobs there already. I guess I shall take your place. Mike isn't at all satisfactory — he may as well content himself with the stable and the stock after this summer, William says. And I shall propose stepping in when Mike is requested to leave the garden."

But Uncle Mark had his own ideas about that garden, and who was best-fitted to take his place there. He wished Mrs. Gray to send for Dan. He said he had something

to say to him; and, as he could not reasonably expect to live much longer, he felt that he had better attend to it at once.

The summons was sent none too soon. A great change took place, affecting the old man's speech, that very night. Dan came the next day. He was shocked to find his old friend so ill. Uncle Mark recognized his voice, though his sight was so dim he had supposed him to be the doctor when he entered.

"One of my blunders," he said. "I believe I'm getting blind as a bat. Never mind. It's all right. I'm so glad it's you, Dan, just the one I wanted. You can take my place now."

Mary thought he wandered. But Dan knew what he meant—"At the Hill?" he asked.

"Yes, yes. Mind the garden, and look after Ralph. Keep him there. And keep the amaralds growing, always. Mary'll tell you about them."

With a feeble smile he glanced toward her and then to a small vase of amaranths upon a table near.

Mary explained her father's words, alluding diffidently to the significance which he attached to the flowers.

Uncle Mark watched her lips, as if catching every sound. "There's nothing like them. Dan," he said. "Pashie knows about them. She set me up to it. Get the Bible and read what she said about the crown."

Dan drew his Testament from his vest-pocket.

"Read 'him that overcometh,'" whispered the sick man; "Revelation."

He found the right place for Uncle Mark smiled as he read — "Behold I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is the new Jerusalem."

"Tell the squire so — read the verses to him — and to Ralph too," came another whisper, as Dan closed the book.

After a few minutes — "Dan, ask Mrs.

White to see to 'those other things,' for the children."

Dan didn't understand the allusion, looked up earnestly, expecting an explanation.

Another moment of silence.

"John — and Alice — and Edith — 'those other things.'"

A pause of painful silence to both Mary and Dan.

With labored breath he resumed: "Content — and patience — and gentleness — and kindness — and so forth. Your mother'll know. For their soul's health — she'll tell you."

Dan nodded assent.

"We didn't think — didn't remember them — Phebe and I. We'd been better off — if we had — all of us. There's comfort — and peace in them — all along, if you'll only recollect. Easier to go straight — with them to smooth the rough places. They'll bring hope — and trust — and love; and *faith*. Dan — *faith*. And that's the best medicine — after all — faith is. Do you know that, Dan?"

Dan grasped the old man's hand tenderly.

"Keep a good stock of that, yourself —

faith in our good Father above — faith in Him who came to save us — and faith in our fellow-creatures."

He paused. Mary said he must rest. She feared he was talking too much, and gave him his medicine.

"Can't say enough — time is short, now. *Don't forget*, Dan — faith in our fellow-creatures. Yes, child — poor, erring mortals we all are; — and we want it so much for ourselves — we must have patience and faith for every other. You'll want considerable of both of them with Ralph. And so will the squire. But you've found Ralph's bright spot, — we've all got one, somewhere — weak as we are. Only work in patience — and good, warm, loving faith — and the bright spot 'll spread and spread, till it's pushed out the darkness."

Silence again.

Then, "What's that verse I'm thinking of, Mary. You're my memory now, you know, I get so mixed up."

Mary mused a moment. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more

and more unto the perfect day," she said slowly, as if somewhat in doubt.

"I believe that's about right. That's what I mean. And you can help Ralph to walk such a path. It's going to be cloudy, with him, for a good while, yet. But he'll — have a bright day, by-and-by. Only — you must — get him to know the sun's behind the clouds, Dan."

Not many days after this conversation, Mrs. Grey and Dan were called by Tommy to come and see Mary, for Uncle Mark had gone to sleep. It was the last long sleep. Like a tired child he had sunk into a heavy slumber from which he never awoke; gently passing thus to the eternal world.

CHAPTER XIX.

GATHERED BLOSSOMS.

In conversation with Mr. White soon after her father's death Mary Weston mentioned what he had said about Dan Gray as gardener. Mr. White saw quickly that he should be fortunate indeed if he could secure his services; and offered him good wages, hoping he would come directly, and also take Ralph as assistant.

Dan was quite willing. Work at the mines had been much harder from the first than he had expected, and it was becoming harder and more disagreeable. Under his direction Ralph, being diligent and painstaking, rapidly acquired skill. But I very much

doubt if he would have taken the assistant's place under any other person—he was so anxious to show what he could, or what he might, do. Still, he was quite contented, happy even, to be of use in this way.

With renewed health Ralph did make great exertions to please his brother and his family, and they soon found him an agreeable companion. He had lost the boisterous self-assertion of his earlier years, and was gentle and deferential in manner. On account of his superior education his brother's wife felt that he was authority on many important subjects; and both she and her husband erelong grew fond of quoting "brother Ralph," and became as proud of him as they had been ashamed.

Mr. Thornton often dropped in to see Miss Weston after her father's death. He had a high respect for him, he said; and related some of the conversations they had held. So Mary was moved to tell him the story of the amaranths. As a consequence he expressed great interest in Patience Grey.

"She was once one of my brother's patients. Had he remained here, I believe she would

have been able before now to use her limbs as well as any one," he observed. "She certainly is not gaining under Dr. Mullins' treatment. I wish she could be taken to the city for my brother to see, or that he could come here. It's a shame for her to be in such a suffering state so long."

Mary had never till now known that his relatives, any of them, lived in the city; or that one was a physician — he had frequently mentioned his brother, but never spoke of his profession. She wondered if she had ever met any of them, particularly if the Dr. Thornton, of her acquaintance, was his brother. But she felt a strange repugnance about enquiring — either of him, or of Mrs. Grey, even — closely enough to satisfy her curiosity.

Mrs. Grey had spent so much on account of Pashie's lameness she did not feel able to incur any more expense. "I must be satisfied to see my darling a cripple," she said, when Mary mentioned Mr. Thornton's remarks. "And Patience will learn to be contented to live thus also."

As winter drew near, Patience seemed a little better and stronger. "For this we cannot be too thankful," she said to Ellen. "Possibly in time nature will effect a cure. If she only regains good, vigorous health, it is no great matter if she is lame, and her figure crooked. Though I could wish from the bottom of my heart, to see her what she was once — as pretty and sprightly as any girl in the country."

Dan differed from his mother on that point, had his own private plans in regard to Patience; but just at present they could not be carried out.

Mary Weston had said to him in confidence that she should deem it a privilege to be allowed to do something for Patience; that at any time her services, or her purse — or both — were ready. She had lately received the remainder of Mrs. Wareham's bequest, and with her chastened tastes and economical habits, actually began to feel burdened by such an excess of riches. She felt too that she owed a large debt of gratitude both to Mrs. Grey and Patience; not only for their kindness to

her father during so many years, but for her final restoration to her father's favor.

Mrs. Bond had heard of Uncle Mark's death; and soon afterward, with the assistance of Mrs. Fay, managed to write a letter expressing her sympathy for Mary's bereavement, and begging her not to bury herself in that lonely village any longer, but to come to the city and live like a lady — now that she had the means and nobody with a claim upon her.

Mary answered it kindly, but stated expressly that she enjoyed her present home, and had no wish for a change.

"Other letters followed, till an invitation came from Mrs. Fay to spend Thanksgiving with them; "Isaac had newly-furnished the parlor, and she wished Miss Weston could see how nice it looked." But Mary was glad that a previous invitation from the Lancasters excused her from accepting Mrs. Fay's. The Lancasters had shown themselves friendly in many ways, and she was delighted to avail herself of this opportunity to become more acquainted with them and their daughter, Mrs. Norton. She wished too to consult Mr. Lancaster in regard

to the investment of her funds from Mrs. Wareham's estate; also in relation to the purchase or the building of a more comfortable house. She had already improved the old cottage internally. Soon after her return, with her father's assistance, had converted the lean-to into a convenient and pretty kitchen; and recently, of the old kitchen as handsome a parlor as she desired had been made.

She was quite contented to have things remain just as they now were — to live always in the old house. But Mr. White had said, "Real estate is low and lumber and wages cheap; Miss Weston ought to take advantage of these things since she has the means."

Mr. Lancaster did not agree with Mr. White. He could place her money where it would yield a sure and steady income. Mary had a high opinion of Mr. Lancaster's judgment. The money was invested as he advised; and she never regretted taking that advice.

Again in due time came Christmas. Mary Weston invited Mrs. Grey with all her family to pass the day with her. But Patience was too lame to leave the house. On that account

Mrs. Grey insisted she must come to them, as at last Christmas. And Mary could not refuse.

It surely was not a sad group that gathered at Mrs. Grey's that day, though their thoughts were often on him whose place was now vacant. They had been talking of him, with mournful pleasure, just after dinner, when a knock was heard at the door.

Dan, the only one of the family who expected this, hastened to open it, and ushered in Mr. Thornton, and "My brother, Dr. Thornton," said the first-named gentleman, as a younger man stepped in also.

Mrs. Grey was at first slightly embarrassed; but both she and Patience were rejoiced to see "the new doctor," as they used to call him. Dan was quite self-possessed.

Dr. Thornton, after exchanging greetings with Mrs. Grey and Patience — and not passing Ellen without a hearty hand-shake — advanced to Mary Weston, saying as he glanced toward his brother, who was watching both him and Mary with very significant looks, "I need no introduction to this lady."

She had colored deeply at the first sound of

his voice, but eagerly extended her hand to meet his in friendly grasp. And there was an unusual radiance in her eyes as she briefly answered this salutation.

"Come, come, John," said Mr. Thornton, a few minutes later, seeing his brother yet in conversation with Mary. He himself had taken Patience to his knee, and was asking about her lameness.) "Have you forgotten your errand? I thought you came to see this little girlie."

Trip annoyed by Mr. Thornton's attentions to Pashie—he was tenderly stroking her hair—snapped and growled fiercely.

"You needn't be jealous, you rascal!" he exclaimed, tweaking the dog's ear, "I'm not going to steal Pashie's heart."

With a deep breath the dog subsided, dropping his cowed head in silence—and kept it respectfully during the remainder of Mr. Thornton's call—though he eyed him narrowly from his sullen, blinking lids.

Again Mr. Thornton spoke:

"Come, John, come. Business before friends is my motto," a merry laugh ended his remark.

"Ay, ay, Herbert," replied the doctor. "But

this meeting with Miss Weston is so unexpected you must excuse me. Now, Pashie, I'm going to see what I can do for you."

Then he questioned Mrs. Grey closely; asked what advice she had had since he last saw Patience, what medicines she had taken, and what had been Dr. Mullins' method.

Patience watched every expression of his face, and when her mother told him of the horrid box, with its lacings; the dreadful plaster cast; and the heavy iron weights, and the fearful pain they gave her in the autumn, he shook his head so sorrowfully that she began to tremble.

But afterward he talked so pitifully, and yet so bright and cheery, she brightened up again. And when he said, "Ah, well, we'll let that all go now," and patted her thin little hand, that he had taken, so softly, and added — "Pashie, we'll have you running about blithely next Christmas," she was ready to cry for joy.

"You've been very patient, dear," he continued. But I must ask you to be just the same three months longer. With different

management during that time your mother and I can set you well forward. Now can I depend upon you for that?"

"*Three months more*" — the poor child was very, very disappointed — it seemed too hard to wait so much longer. She could not speak — her mother answered for her.

"She will do anything you say, I know. If for no other reason, because I wish it. And Dan wishes it also, I suppose, or you wouldn't have come; and she's always willing to please Dan."

"Now that is settled," said Mr. Thornton, playfully pinching Pashie's cheeks; "and we'll have a better color here before long. And, John, you have my permission for five minutes conversation with Miss Weston — no more. We promised to be back in half an hour, you know. I'll allow ten minutes grace. Improve it — talk as fast as you can. And say what you please," he added, with a knowing look. "Dan, I want to talk with you about the Fairberg mines — think I must take a trip down there some day."

Dr. Thornton fully realized that the oppor-

tunity he had long desired had at last come; but, so unexpectedly, that he trembled lest by some inadvertence this also, like others before, should be lost. He tried to collect his thoughts — to seem unconcerned — but it was impossible. For an instant, that appeared to him an half-hour, he was stupidly silent — watching the lift of the loose little wavelet on Mary's forehead; whose movement, when she turned her face toward him, thrilled him with its beauty as the touch of her hand did on that memorable day when she left him with his fever patient, and vividly recalled that incident.

Why was it that at the same instant she should ask him in the most matter-of-fact manner, with the steadiest voice, though her eyes contradicted the expression of her lips, how the Crowleys were — if he had seen Barbara lately?

"Yes he had seen them — been with them much, and often." He did not say, with the frequent hope and wish of seeing, of meeting her there, also.

Poor overworked Barbara had pined and

passed away in a quick consumption. And Charlie-boy, too, had died, previously, of diphtheria — which was the beginning of Barbara's illness. But the family were now all comfortable; and the father earning enough to keep them above want.

Barbara dead! Poor little Barbara! with her pitiful attempts at brightening her cheerless home, and making the best of her uninteresting little brothers. Mary now saw that she had really been very dear to her. This was sad news. In her great sorrow she could not control her voice to speak — and she would have liked to tell him of her plan for Barbara's education. He saw her emotion, and was also silent.

But time was passing. He said hurriedly — "May I ask if this is your home?"

He did not wait for an answer. "I have tried so many times, in so many ways, to find you in the city."

He paused an instant. Then — "I have needed you so much." He spoke low and earnestly.

Mary was still thinking of Barbara and

did not mind what he said till she heard those last words. Then a sudden light broke in upon her mind, and memory swiftly set in view his courteous deference to her opinions, his unobtrusive kindnesses while she was at Mrs. Sidney's — matters which she had never dared suppose had any particular significance. And yet when she saw him at the Crowleys — and now —

She suddenly stopped thinking, and involuntarily met his pleading gaze.

It was enough. This opportunity had not been lost. The doctor's face was fairly radiant. Mary's turned from the company, in confusion. Only Pashie saw it. And she supposed that she was trying to hide her grief for Barbara.

"Time's up!" cried Mr. Thornton, drawing his watch and pointing to the minute-hand. "Can't stop for any farther arrangements. You must come some other day and finish up, John."

Dan was desirous that Dr. Thornton should give Patience close attention. So he came every few days. And after he had been at

Mrs. Grey's and finished his professional call there he had always some errand next door: "Miss Weston has proved herself such an excellent nurse, she must be consulted about this or that city-patient. Oh, I must have the benefit of Miss Weston's judgment and experience in such and such trying cases."

When spring opened, the doctor said Patience would gain faster if under his immediate care, and proposed Mrs. Grey's removal to the city. She acquiesced — was ready to do anything that he thought would help the child; and began to make ready for the change.

Aunt Hannah had heard of Mary's legacy, and had written congratulations, and sent an urgent invitation for her to visit her. So Mary made preparations for spending a few weeks, partly with her, partly with the Fay's; and would accompany Mrs. Grey and Patience. Strange to say, Mary now looked forward with pleasure to meeting the Fays.

Mrs. Grey was not able to find a house that she liked, although she went into the city three times for that special purpose. So there was some delay. But she began her packing.

One day when Mary happened to be in, helping her with a box that needed particular care, Dr. Thornton surprised them all by saying, just as he was about to leave, "I have found a house that I think will suit you, Mrs. Grey. It is not quite ready. Go on with your packing. I'll tell you more about it to-morrow or the next day."

To-morrow came, and the doctor came also. But — "No. He had nothing further to tell yet — must have three days more. He hoped then to give them some very pleasant information."

On the third day he told them. "I have often wished," said he, "to have a house of my own, where I could keep important cases directly under my own observation and immediate control. I have wanted this for the poor — for children, especially. Latterly I have been more than ever convinced of the need of this. And I have at last succeeded in getting a suitable building, and in an airy, healthy location. A matron is needed for such an institution — it will I hope become an institution, though only my private dwell-

ing. And I mean to conduct it in such a way that if the wealthy wish to avail themselves, or their children, of its advantages, they shall be satisfied; and, yet, that no patient, however poor, or degraded, shall hesitate to come.

"I know just what sort of a person would be suitable for matron of such a home—a home it shall be in every sense of the word—and I have secured her services. You will find her a very agreeable companion, Mrs. Grey; and you and Pashie must be in readiness to come to us as soon as the house is opened."

When Dr. Thornton made his next call Mrs. Grey congratulated him on his good fortune. She had met his brother on her way down town that morning, and he had spoken very freely of the doctor's plans, which he highly approved. He approved also a wedding that was to take place before the house could be considered ready for the doctor's patients. But he mentioned no name.

Mrs. Grey was not inquisitive. She asked no questions. But she had a strong impression that the matron of whom the doctor

had spoken would also be the bride at that wedding.

And she was right. She was not surprised to hear Mary Weston say that she too was to go to Dr. Thornton's, and that her visit to Aunt Hannah and the Fays was indefinitely postponed — that she should probably spend the remainder of her life in the city.

Whether the doctor's knowledge of her intended visit to the Fays had anything to do with this sudden change was never divulged.

Ellen, though sorry to lose the society of Miss Weston, rejoiced at her pleasant prospects. She had lately taken up dress-making, was very successful with it, and glad to hire the Weston cottage as a home for herself and her children.

Dan, when his mother left, was invited to live at Pleasant Hill. He closed up the house with regret. But, with the expectation of his mother's return in the autumn with Patience restored to health, went cheerfully to join Mr. White's family. And Trip went with him, and made himself useful in guarding the squire's orchard.

Endeavoring in all respects to follow Uncle Mark's advice, Dan planted a large bed of amaranths. Mary had kept a wreath of these flowers upon her father's grave, and the day before her marriage she made an agreement with him to renew that wreath often. But Ralph White, recognizing the influence which the flowers had exerted — even to the brightening of his own beclouded life — took great delight in anticipating him in that labor of love. And he and Dan vied with each other in keeping the bed of amaranths in fine condition.

A handsome bouquet of these flowers, the combined work of Dan and Ralph, was one of Mary Weston's wedding gifts. Among them all this had the most honorable place — this she valued the most highly — this pleased her most.

It was a delicate proof of their discernment. Though she had said nothing of her great love for the amaranths, she had felt that her new home would not be complete without them — their lessons of compassion and endurance had brought her such refreshment, such blessed-

ness and peace, she would have them ever in sight.

Some persons have had the impression that her marriage led to a change in the investment of the property which Mr. Lancaster had managed so advantageously. But it remains the same. Others, judging from her generosity to the Crowleys, have drawn the inference that she, herself, derives less pecuniary benefit, than the doctor's patients do and will continue to derive, from that investment. And they are correct in this opinion.

THE END.